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A SACRED PEOPLE: ROMAN IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS

by

EDWIN MICHAEL BEVENS

Under the direction of Allen Fromherz

ABSTRACT

The Romans redefined the nature of their collective identity to be centered on religion and the connection between the Roman people and their gods during the Augustan age, spanning Augustus' dominance of Roman politics from the late 30s BC until AD 14. This sacral identity was presented through a comprehensive reimagining of Roman history, from the age of myth through the founding of the city and up to the present day, explaining the failures and successes of the city in history. According to Augustan writers, the chaos of the late Republic was due to a decline in piety. They connected Augustus' restoration of religious practice to the glorious past, a past exemplified by great heroes portrayed as forerunners of Augustus. The sacral conception replaced a civic model of Roman identity based on Roman institutions and the *mos maiores*.

INDEX WORDS: Rome, Religion, Identity, Augustus, Vergil, Livy, Horace, Roman Empire, Principate, Roman Republic

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EDWIN MICHAEL BEVENS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

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College of Arts and Sciences

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August 2010

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1 Introduction

*Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens,
insanientis dum sapientiae
consultus erro, nunc retrorsum
vela dare atque iterare cursus
cogor relictos.*

A meager and infrequent worshipper of the gods
while a wanderer consulting foolish wisdom,
now I sail backwards and retrace
the path I had abandoned.
-Horace, *Odes* I.xxxix.1-5

One of the most significant insights of the cultural turn in historical studies was the recognition that in the quest to describe *what* happened, narrate the events and trends of history, it is just as important to study the *who* of history, the subjects of history.¹ This means more than simply writing biographical sketches of famous figures, but delving into historical groups and understanding the cultural identity of people. This entails looking at how people see themselves as much as how others see them, and how this self-perception impacts action.

Even though many scholars have spent significant effort (and done an exceptional job) demonstrating how modern group identity – be it national, ethnic, or otherwise – is often manufactured or invented, in a sense this misses the point. To simply say that these groups are invented and that supposed markers of their identity do not have the historical background that group mythologies claim may be historically accurate but misses the possibility that these identities are indeed significant for people in their lived experience. These national, ethnic, and cultural mythologies have great power for their adherents, and are indeed important in

¹ For a particularly excellent description of the cultural turn in historical studies, see Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), especially pp. 115-182.

structuring self-perception and guiding action.² Regardless of whether a myth is literally true, if people believe it and act in accordance with it, then they have made it a historical reality, at least in the present tense. This present relevance of myth is exemplified by the findings of Jonathan M. Hall, the scholar of ancient Greek identity, who bases his research on myths of descent. Hall notes that “perceptions may be as important as realities. . . while ethnic identity revolves around notions of kinship, the genetic reality of this kinship is unimportant and not infrequently fictitious. What matters is that ethnic members act *as if* they are related.”³ Those two words, *as if*, are the key to this point.

To use the most famous example from Hugh Trevor-Roper in Eric Hobsbawm’s collection, the Scottish clan tartan may date to no earlier than the early nineteenth century; in this sense, the tartan serves a fictitious role in the Scottish national myth. Yet to the extent that people believe the myth and come to see themselves as members of a Scottish nation with deep, lasting bonds and connections with other members of the Scottish national community, then the myth has become reality: it has created in the modern world the very thing that it attributes to the medieval world. It is a social reality, even if it is not literal, historical truth. For this reason, it is a critical goal of historians to examine how historical peoples have seen themselves. These bonds of collective identity are a part of history in that they both bring some groups of people

² For the classic work on invention of tradition, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For the disconnect between modern national and ethnic groups and the medieval peoples they claim direct connection with, see Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). And for the most helpful text on the creation of nations, see Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 1991). Anderson in particular does a good job of drawing the focus away from a dichotomy of truth and falsity and toward the idea of people’s self-conception, without slipping into nationalist mythology itself.

³ Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 14-15. Hall makes these particular comments in the context of comparing his own position to that of Pierre Van den Berghe, who, although he “believes that there is usually some biological truth to the myth of common descent,” acknowledges that the perception of descent yields the same results as actual descent.

together and drive others apart, influencing how people see others and, in turn, what actions they take towards them.

Studies of collective identity have grown rapidly among ancient historians in recent decades, particularly among scholars of the Greek world. Scholars have been fascinated by the development of Greek identity, from the dark ages of Greece through the classical period, from the Hellenistic Age through to its period of political dormancy under Roman rule.⁴ Despite this plethora of work being done on Greek identity, there is not a comparable genre of works on Roman identity. There is a great deal of work published on cultural identity of groups *under* Roman rule, whether Greek, Italian, British, or Jewish, among others, but little on Roman identity itself. As Emma Dench notes, “It is interesting that there is no essay on *Roman* ‘cultural identity’” in Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry’s 1998 collection of essays entitled *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*.⁵ In this collection, Laurence writes that “key to any understanding of cultural identity within the Roman Empire is a clear conception of how the Romans viewed themselves and what made them distinctly *Roman*.” After making this statement, however, he proceeds to move away from any such discussion after a mere paragraph, where he suggests that “Roman” means simply citizenship and has little substantive content of its own. The rest of introduction and the book are concerned with the assertion of local or alternative identities, expressed against Roman colonialism – examples include studies of non-Roman Italians, Britain, and gladiators.⁶ As seen here, Roman identity is dramatically undertheorized – an assumed category that apparently needs no explanation before delving into

⁴ To give just a few examples among the many works published: for Greek identity during the classical age after the Persian Wars, see Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); for ethnic identities of different groups of Greeks, see Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); for a study of Greek cultural identity after the loss of political independence, see Simon Goldhill, Ed., *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ Emma Dench, *Romulus’ Asylum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 26n.

⁶ Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, Eds., *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2-3.

local alternatives to Roman identity. As Thomas Habinek laments, “Classical studies persists in its Romantic preference for the personal over the ideological, for narrative history over cultural studies, and for events and policies over the representations that shape and are shaped by them.”⁷ As Habinek indicates, I believe that by missing out on so much of representation in the Roman world, we are missing a significant factor in the life of people in the ancient world, details that would greatly aid in understanding this world.

This lack of theorization about Roman identity is not a mere oversight. Roman identity is passed over by scholars, as it is seen as not an appropriate subject for cultural identity: many scholars see Roman identity as merely citizenship, as Laurence hinted above. Employing a very strict definition of the ethnic group, Hall is very explicit in his discussion on ethnic identity in the ancient world that the category “Roman” is excluded: “*Romanitas* is precisely *not* an ethnic identification. It is the cultural communication of a legal-juridical status that lacked any concept of a common ethnic core. Even those Romans who inhabited the city of Rome itself and claimed descent from generations of Roman forefathers would not have professed otherwise: Roman identity was predicated from an early date on the notion of ethnic heterogeneity between Latin, Sabine and Etruscan populations.”⁸ The argument is simply that being Roman just meant legal rights of citizenship: it brought no other baggage of cultural content or connection with other Romans along with it in the way that Greek identity does in Hall’s model.

Acceptance of this vision of *Romanitas* goes along with an understanding of Roman culture as secondary, with Greece as the primary culture. Scholars implicitly hearken back to Horace, who wrote in the *Epistles* that “Captive Greece captivated her uncivilized conqueror and

⁷ Thomas Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 88.

⁸ Hall, *Hellenicity*, 23.

brought the arts to rustic Latium.”⁹ This image gave rise to the idea of the dual processes of Hellenization and Romanization, by which first Rome adopted Greek culture before spreading this culture to the rest of its non-Greek domains. Implicit is the idea that Rome had no culture of its own – no great myths, no cultural attachments – prior to its cultural takeover by Greece. Romanization, the process of Rome’s spreading common culture across the Mediterranean, is simply the last great step in the Hellenization process, ongoing since Alexander. As G.W. Bowersock writes in his description of Augustus’ relations with the Greek world, “Romanization is an unnecessary postulate for eastern colonization of this age. It is chiefly a word which describes what subsequently happened in certain areas of the western empire, and what did not happen in the East.”¹⁰ Romanization could not happen in the East, of course, because it would have been redundant; the East was already Hellenized, and had no need of Romanization, since it brought no new cultural content that had not itself come from Greece and the East, these scholars claim. John Julius Norwich’s interpretation is typical: “The first thing to remember is that the Romans always saw themselves as heirs of the Greeks. . . though politically they might take very different forms, culturally the Romans like to think they were continuing the Greek tradition.”¹¹ The Romans are thus oftentimes seen as nothing more than latter-day Greeks, not a separate group to be taken completely serious in its own right.

Much of this stems from confusion over how to define who was “Roman.” When scholars are unsure as to who the Romans were, it is no wonder that there is such confusion over Roman identity. To the extent that *Romanitas* is associated strictly with citizenship, then the idea that Roman identity was merely a collection of political rights must be true, as Roman

⁹ Horace, *Epistles* II.I.156-7. A note on translations: all translations from Latin texts are my own, while the source of all translations from Greek are credited in the first citation of each particular work.

¹⁰ G.W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 72.

¹¹ John Julius Norwich, *The Middle Sea* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 45.

citizenship constantly expanded throughout history, being extended first to certain cities in Italy, then to all of Italy, and finally to all free men under Caracalla in AD 212, along with selective grants to individuals throughout Roman history. The Jewish apostle Paul, arrested in Jerusalem in the mid-first century AD, was able to assert his status as a Roman citizen.¹² If citizenship is the definition of who self-identifies as Roman, then it is indeed impossible to find common ground between all the people in this category. The argument here, however, is that scholars have confused two different classes of Romans: Roman citizens, the broader category, and the Roman core, the people of Rome who extended the rights of Roman citizenship to others. This Roman core consisted of the people of the city of Rome, or the famous *Senatus Populusque Romanus* (The Senate and the Roman People, commonly abbreviated as SPQR). Romans themselves were very aware of the distinction between Romans and Roman citizens or allies, as evidenced by the way Romans closely guarded certain citizenship rights – and only slowly extended full citizenship during the Republic – and separated their army into Roman and allied branches, for instance.¹³ Extended citizenship was certainly a way to participate in Roman culture, and many who gained the citizenship went on to self-identify as Romans culturally, but only a minority of new citizens would so fully put on *Romanitas*. Most retained their original cultural identity while simply adding Roman rights, not necessarily all the cultural content that Romans (as opposed to Roman citizens) identified with, particularly in the Republican and early Imperial periods.¹⁴ And while Hall recognizes that this distinction could be made, he still argues

¹² Acts 22:23-29.

¹³ For further discussion, see chapter 2. Sherwin-White remains the foremost authority.

¹⁴ Over time, of course, Roman citizens took on more and more of the characteristics of Romans themselves, but even this was incomplete. Allegiance to Rome certainly grew, but for many in the Mediterranean, cultural life continued, supplemented by some Roman institutions and practices. See Jamie Patrick Nay, “Citizenship, Culture and Ideology in Roman Greece” (Master’s Thesis, University of Victoria, 2007), 98, where the author argues that Romanization is as much about native support as it is imperial conquest, and citizens in the provinces had widely varying ideas of what it meant to be “Roman.” We too often approach *Romanitas* like these provincial outsiders,

for too much variance in traditions even at this level. This thesis argues, however, that there was indeed a common culture for the Roman people. While Hall is right to point out that Romans came from a mixing of Latin, Sabine, and Etruscan elements, what is also significant is that the three groups came together and formed a new group, Romans, regardless of their heritage. The Sabine Claudians were just as Roman as the Latin Horatians. While coming from different origins, these peoples self-identified as Romans and no longer as members of these other groups. This should be contrasted with later groups attaining the Roman citizenship, who retained their ethnic identity and added *Romanitas* at precisely the level of legal rights that scholars have noted.¹⁵

With the foundational premise that there is indeed a cultural identity tied to this ethnic Roman core, the central argument of this thesis is that during the reign of Augustus, there was a concerted effort to redefine Roman identity. Based on S.N. Eisenstadt's typology that describes three different kinds of codes for building collective identity (primordial, civic, and sacral), this thesis argues that during this period Roman identity shifted from being a civic identity, based on "familiarity with implicit and explicit rules of conduct, traditions, and social routines that define and demarcate the boundary of the collectivity," to a sacral identity, linking "the constituted boundary between 'us and them' not to natural conditions, but to a particular relation of the collective subject to the realm of the sacred and the sublime."¹⁶ Romans imagined themselves as a collective group during this period as having a special, unique relationship with the gods, which explained both their successes and their periods of difficulty and chaos. Historians of

seeing the multiple meanings and concluding that there was nothing beyond the juridical status; a more emic perspective is necessary to see *Romanitas* as Romans saw it.

¹⁵ For an excellent example of this phenomenon of retaining local identity while adding Roman rights in Magna Graecia, see Kathryn Lomas, *Rome and the Western Greeks, 350 BC - AD 200* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁶ S.N. Eisenstadt, "World History and the Construction of Collective Identity" in *World History: Ideologies, Structures, and Identities*, ed. by Philip Pomper, Richard H. Elphick, and Richard T. Vann (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 107.

Roman religion often noted descriptions in Augustan literature of a decline in piety in Roman society during the late Republic. Recently, scholars have hinted that something about this argument was important to Roman self-image and Augustan propaganda, noting that perhaps this perception of decline before the coming of Augustus is even more important than debating the question of whether or not there actually was decline. While these scholars have generally avoided pursuing this line of inquiry, as it was tangential to their goal of describing Roman religion rather than Roman identity, this study will look at the ways sources from the time of the Emperor Augustus viewed Rome as a sacral community, defined by the relationship between the gods and the community throughout Roman history.

1.1 Historiography

As mentioned before, there has been significantly less research done on Roman identity than on Greek and other group identity. However, this does not mean that no work has been done. The two main schools of thought to be examined here are those of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and Emma Dench.

Wallace-Hadrill's work on the Augustan cultural revolution has been profoundly important to studying Roman identity, as he demonstrates the important cultural markers of *Romanitas* in the Augustan Age. His argument builds upon and expands the argument of Ronald Syme, who saw Augustus' victory as the triumph of Italian elites against the Roman traditional power structure. Wallace-Hadrill sees the reign of Augustus as a period of renegotiation of Roman identity, when "citizenship is no longer expressed through actions (voting, fighting) but through symbols: it becomes more urgent to define culturally what 'being Roman' is about when

it is reduced to a socio-legal status.”¹⁷ As Roman citizenship was extended throughout the Mediterranean and Roman rule extended to more and more people, it became more important to define a Roman core. Wallace-Hadrill documents the way Romans asserted cultural identity through dress, language, architecture, and other features of life. He argues that *Romanitas* was undertheorized by Romans themselves prior to Augustus, as they had not seen a need to define themselves against others, but came to add these cultural markers during the reign of Augustus.

This cultural definition of *Romanitas* is most frequently contrasted against Greek identity and culture in Wallace-Hadrill’s account. Latin grammar is contrasted with Greek, Roman architecture with Greek, and the Roman toga with the Greek pallium. This explicit interest in Rome and Greece stems from Wallace-Hadrill’s focus on resolving the debate over Hellenization and Romanization: he is interested in how we interpret these two processes, asserting a new model (bilingualism) against the traditional models of retention vs. replacement, fusion, or creolization.¹⁸ What he sees is that even as Rome is adopting elements of Greek culture and in many ways becoming more similar to Greece, Roman culture is asserting itself more stridently than ever against Greek. An analogy can be made with foreign language training. Students learning a second language often find that in the process of learning a new language, they come to better understand their native tongue. Similarly, Wallace-Hadrill argues that even as Rome adopted more and more Greek elements and encountered more foreign practices, Romans began more explicit theorization and understanding of their own culture.

While Wallace-Hadrill’s work is powerful, there are still questions. For one, he takes the essential facts of Hellenization and Romanization for granted; these processes are the ones that interest him, and so he remains focused on Rome and Greece at all times, ignoring any other

¹⁷ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome’s Cultural Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 450-2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-13.

processes that might be going on simultaneously that also impact Roman culture and identity. He merely alters the interpretation of these two processes, but is still firmly rooted in an essential contrast between Greek and Roman. There is little room in his account for other influences besides Greek. By focusing on the emphasis on cultural factors under Augustus, he also overlooks cultural factors that were important during the Republican Era. While Wallace-Hadrill acknowledges that the process of cultural revolution had its roots in Rome's expansion under the Republic, he has little interest in identifying these features or tracing their early development. Finally, my argument diverges from Wallace-Hadrill's in that the shift he identifies is essentially from one form of civic identity to another, using Eisenstadt's categories. Roman identity shifts from the communal activities of fighting and voting – connected to civic institutions – to cultural categories such as those mentioned above of language, dress, and architecture; but these are still foci of civic identity, as they are connected to traditional culture. This thesis will demonstrate that this redefinition under Augustus was actually far more radical.

Emma Dench presents a more complex picture of Roman identity in *Romulus' Asylum*. With a broad perspective looking at Roman identity from the middle Republican period to the reign of Hadrian, she traces many of the broad threads that comprise Roman identity during the time frame. In contrast to perspectives on Roman identity that privilege Greece, whether as source or as contrast, Dench sees Greece as only one of many influences on Roman identity.¹⁹ She is just as interested in relationships with fellow Italians and other peoples.²⁰ A central theme of Dench's work is that Roman identity is by its very nature multiple, complex, and variegated.²¹ In Dench's view, there are many foci of Roman identity, which each have periods where they are

¹⁹ Dench, *Romulus' Asylum*, 28.

²⁰ This concern with Italian peoples is perhaps best seen in her earlier work; see Emma Dench, *From Barbarians to New Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²¹ Dench, *Romulus' Asylum*, 3-5.

more emphasized and others where they are less visible. For instance, the idea of Roman Italy became far more important in the first century BC after the Social War than it had been in the Middle Republic; after this major revolt by the Italian allies and subsequent extension of the citizenship, it became more important to emphasize Rome's Italian-ness.²² For instance, Cicero frequently refers to "*Tota Italia*," "All of Italy," when he is referring to Rome, and his "new man" ideology is based upon the theory that Italy is the source of virtue and rejuvenation for the decadent city of Rome: the city corrupts its residents, and Rome thus needs a steady flow of Italians from the countryside to come and restore morality. Varro's *De Re Rustica* argues that Italy should be seen as an organic whole, and Vergil's *Georgics* similarly pursue the theme that Italy is like a body, with each of its different parts playing a different role but coming together to form a unified whole – Rome is a part of Italy and has its role to play, but it is integrally connected to the rest of Italy. While there are many themes she treats, Dench sees one factor as foundational to Roman identity: traditionalism, the *mos maiorum*, writing, "Roman cultural identity is . . . heavily moral in its focus: that is to say that our own categories of culture and morality blur nicely within the Roman formula of 'the ways of our ancestors,' the *mores maiorum*."²³ In this grand scheme view of ethnic Roman identity, there are many factors, but this sense of traditionalism is the ever-present foundation for all the other factors.

Although Dench's work is particularly good at looking at the big picture and the grand scheme of things in Roman identity, this grand perspective results in something of a smoothing out of some of the specifics of Roman identity. The work accomplishes what it sets out to do, which is to identify long-term patterns and threads and trace them through history, seeing them picked up by different writers at different points throughout the time period Dench is analyzing.

²² Ibid., 152-7.

²³ Ibid., 139.

What Dench's work might miss, then, is short-term shifts such as those that I am interested in analyzing here. Dench's method allows her to cite, for instance, Plautus, Cicero, Livy, and Seneca all to analyze the same point, despite their each coming from quite different time periods, if they all hit on the same theme. My goal, however, is to look at Augustan writers and note what makes their writings different from those of their predecessors.

1.2 Methodology

One of the most significant models for the following study has been provided by Jonathan Hall's work on Greek identity in his two works, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* and *Hellenicity*. While I have already noted above my disagreement with Hall as to the nature of *Romanitas*, I still believe his methodology can be applied to Roman identity, regardless of whether he accepts its classification as ethnic or not. There are several different methods one could use to fit Rome into Hall's ethnic discourse. First, we can argue that Roman identity does indeed match his self-admittedly narrow criteria for ethnicity. As Hall writes, "Ultimately the definitional *criteria* or 'core elements' which determine membership in an ethnic group – and distinguish the ethnic group from other social collectivities – are a putative subscription to a myth of common descent and kinship, an association with a specific territory and a sense of shared history."²⁴ It can be argued that Rome can be made to fit these categories. To handle the simplest first, Roman identity can clearly be connected to a specific territory: the city of Rome, a theme that will be picked up on later in chapter four when we discuss Camillus. Secondly, a sense of shared history is also simple to argue, as the narrative of overthrow of the monarchy, Struggle of the Orders, Punic Wars, and conquest of the Mediterranean provided a shared history

²⁴ Hall, *Hellenicity*, 9-10.

for Romans. The importance of shared history is also understood by Roman scholars of identity – Habinek notes that “there is a close connection between a people’s construction of its past and its sense of identity in the present.”²⁵ The myth of common descent is more complicated; Rome has no myth of one common ancestor the way Greeks do with the Hellenic genealogy.²⁶ However, during the Augustan period the Trojan narrative provided just such a myth; even though Roman families did not all point back to the same ancestor, a large number of them drew connections back to Trojan roots, to a group that undoubtedly would fit the idea of kinship, providing common descent from the Trojan people as the fictive kinship of the Roman world. As Hall himself notes, “Genealogical traditions represent an extremely valuable type of literary evidence since the familial nature of genealogies is especially suited to articulating notions of descent and relatedness.”²⁷ This idea will be explored in more detail in chapter three, but this will suffice to demonstrate one way in which Hall’s methodology can be used in a context where he himself does not see it as applicable. Of course, a perhaps simpler way would be to reject his narrow definition of ethnicity and redefine it in broader terms, perhaps using Colin Renfrew’s broad idea of self-recognition as an ethnic group or David Konstan’s polythetic definition of ethnicity that sees descent as only one possible source of ethnicity.²⁸

²⁵ Habinek, *Politics of Latin Literature*, 94. Habinek compares the Augustan-era fascination with cultural antiquities and history to “contemporary debates over ‘the canon,’” noting that concerns over such things tend to reflect “broader cultural conflicts of the period.”

²⁶ Hall, *Hellenicity*, 26-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-13. It should be noted that Hall explicitly rejects both of these alternatives. I think, however, that he overstates both rejections. In rejecting Renfrew’s definition, he makes the argument *ad absurdum* that Renfrew would see Chicago Bulls fans as equally deserving of ethnic status as Ionian Greeks. This is, of course, ridiculous; there is a difference in kind, as members of a sports fandom do not necessarily feel any actual connection with fellow fans, but rather they have a shared connection with the team. As Renfrew’s idea of ethnicity is based on “group self-recognition,” it is important to note that no sports fan base would recognize itself as an ethnicity, making Hall’s counter-argument null. As for Konstan, Hall rejects his polythetic definition that sees kinship as only one possible source of ethnicity along with other possible factors such as religion, language, or other cultural factors as making ethnicity too difficult to categorize. I wonder, however, if perhaps we might be better off embracing complexity, even if, as a result, ethnicity’s “heuristic potential becomes extremely limited.”

Hall's focus on a myth of common descent, a shared homeland, and a common history will provide a framework of the rest of this work, which will demonstrate not only the way these categories were used in Augustan literature to create a notion of ethnic Roman identity, but a specifically religious, sacral ethnicity. The work will focus on written works; as Hall notes, "Since ethnicity is discursively constructed through the employment of symbols such as fictive kinship, literary evidence will normally constitute the initial point of departure in any analysis of ancient ethnicity."²⁹ This basic outline coming from Hall will structure the rest of the argument. Many of the prominent writers of the Augustan Age will be featured, as their work was deeply embedded in the ideological movements of the time; as Alessandro Barchiesi writes, Augustan-ness can be viewed in many ways, including as "a world vision (and thus an ideology). . . . It can be a variable combination [of] elements, a combination to which the perceptions gathered from the literary texts add their contributions."³⁰

Another important concept for this study comes from Joseph Mali and his study of mythistory. Mali undertakes to rescue Herodotus' reputation from the followers of Thucydides (to present his argument in a pair of polar opposites), arguing that we should not see Herodotus as the "Father of Lies," but as doing something very important in recording the myths of the people he studied. As Mali points out, "Those who realized, as [Herodotus] did, that they were the historical myths of these nations would not ask whether they were true or false, but rather

²⁹ Ibid., 19. While this is Hall's most succinct statement of this principle, he makes the case more elaborately in several sections of *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. In particular, from 34-66 he provides examples of the power of this kind of discursive, literary analysis for identity studies in the ancient world, analyzing the different myths of the Argolid. Meanwhile, from 111-142 he analyzes the potential for studying identity through archaeological evidence, coming to the perhaps startlingly conclusion that "the entire enterprise has little chances of success in situations where the *only* evidence to hand is archaeological" (p. 142). While I am more positive about the contributions of archaeology to identity studies in the ancient world (the work of Ian Hodder at Catalhoyuk, just to use one dramatic example, is quite promising), I share his premise that literary sources have special power in identity studies and should always provide the starting point when they are available.

³⁰ Alessandro Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 7.

what they meant.”³¹ Following in this vein, this study will devote a large amount of attention to Roman historical myths, stories that are either unverifiable or hotly debated as to their veracity by Thucydidean-type historians.³² It is only by “taking historical myths seriously” that we can understand their purpose, showing what they said to the Roman people (and what the Roman people said to themselves). In a particularly apt statement, Mali writes that “a myth should thus be thought of primarily not as an explanation of the world but as an expression of how the people perceive it, a representation of the world in terms of their fears, wishes, and so on.”³³ In this reading, beyond trying to get at the literal truth of myths, it is not even important necessarily to determine whether people literally believed in the myths; what is important is that the myths symbolize how people see the world. To use an example from American culture, the story of George Washington and the cherry tree comes to mind. First, we approach the story in the most literal way: the story is invented and never happened. Then we look at whether people believe it is true: most people realize that it is indeed a legend and untrue. But if we dig deeper, we see the significance of the myth: even though people do not believe in the literal myth, it symbolizes to Americans the idea that their founders were exceptionally virtuous men, leading to the idea of American exceptionalism. Similarly, Roman myths reveal deeper truths about how they saw the world and their own history and nature.

A final methodological note that informs this argument comes from William Sewell’s theory on structures and agency. Sewell looks for a way for there to be structures that still provides room for agency and change in structures. He finds this direction by a combination of factors, including multiplicity of structures, transposability of schema, and polysemy of

³¹ Joseph Mali, *Mythistory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

³² The Aeneas story would qualify as the former, while an example of the latter that will be analyzed is the *evocatio* of Juno Regina from Veii; some scholars uncritically present the story as gospel while others see it as an invention of Livy (or his source, whoever that might be for this particular episode).

³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

resources. By multiplicity of structures, Sewell means that there is not just one big, unmovable line, but rather several different structures, such as linguistic structures, political structures, economic structures, or religious structures. Transposability and polysemy both refer to ways in which people can use things in unintended ways; transposability is using rules intended for one structure and applying them in a possibly related, but unintended setting, such as using political rules in a religious setting or vice versa. Polysemy refers to the fact that nothing is set in stone; any action can have multiple meanings depending on how it is intended, where it is performed, how it is performed, and who performs it, among other things. Change can occur when people thus use their resources in unanticipated ways and redefine their structures.³⁴ This thesis proposes that Sewell's theory helps to explain what is happening with the shift in Roman identity under Augustus. Augustan writers did not just suddenly invent an idea that religious piety and the relationship with the gods is important to Roman identity. They gave this idea newfound meaning and importance by playing with ideas that were already current, if backgrounded, in Republican discourse. The changed context of the Augustan principate means that it is very easy for writers to apply concepts from Republican discourse and give them new meanings that result in changes in identity. Specifically, much Republican discourse was built around aristocratic competition, with different families, *gens*, promoting different models of *Romanitas*. This notion of aristocratic competition and promoting different models takes on completely new meaning when Augustus takes sole power; no longer is there any aristocratic competition, as he is the last man standing. Thus, asserting his vision of *Romanitas* is dramatically different than efforts by previous Romans, even those who were the most-respected men of their day, as never before had one man held uncontested power. This leads to dramatic redefinition of Roman identity in sacral terms, as this was the model promoted by the Julian clan, as will be discussed later.

³⁴ William Sewell, *Logics of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 139-143.

2 Republican Identity and Religion

Before examining changing conceptions of Roman identity in the Augustan age, this thesis will first provide a brief study of Roman identity in the Republican period preceding the Principate. It is impossible to see any notion of change without knowing what something is changing from. So let us first then examine Roman identity during the Republican period by looking at some of the major writers of the long period from the mid-2nd century BC until the rise of the Second Triumvirate in 43 BC; these writers should provide hints as to their conception of Roman identity. First this thesis will be looking at possible continuities between the Republican era and the Augustan era of sacrality to follow, before then looking at other themes that were more prominent in the Republican era than in the early Principate, those ideas that were precisely backgrounded to make room for the idea of a sacral Roman people in the Augustan age.

2.1 Evidence of Sacrality

As mentioned before, it is important to note that ideas of sacrality were not invented in the early Principate. Rather, Augustan writers were modifying and foregrounding ideas that were already present in the middle and late Republican eras. Many Republican authors sound similar notes regarding the importance of Roman piety and religion. Clifford Ando, in fact, argues that “in the century and a half before Vergil declared Rome’s *artes* to be those of dominion, the central claim of Roman orators was of superior piety.”¹ As we shall see, this idea of Roman religion was indeed quite important to Romans during the Republic.

One of the writers who most clearly presents this vision of Romans as above all a pious people is Cicero, whose writings and speeches loom large over the late Republic. At many points, particularly in his philosophical writings, Cicero makes claims regarding Rome’s piety

¹ Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 126.

that clearly relate religion to the very core of what it means to be Roman. Perhaps the most unambiguous statement comes in *On the Response of the Haruspices*, where Cicero flourishes:

However it is not in number we surpass the Spanish, nor in might the Gauls, nor in cleverness the Carthaginians, nor in arts the Greeks, nor lastly in this natural perception, innate in the people of this land, the Italians and Latins, but it is in piety and religion and this unique wisdom - that we ascertain that all things are ruled and directed by the power of the gods – that we exceed all peoples and nations.²

In this text, Cicero clearly relates Roman success to the religion of the Roman community.

Roman religion explains Roman success, as Rome's rivals equal and surpass her in other respects to which we might otherwise be tempted to attribute Roman success. Romans are not innumerable, physically powerful, or particularly clever, Cicero claims. They are in tune with the gods, in a special communion with them in a way that no other people on earth is. This religious sense is what makes Romans *Roman*: the core of their identity in this passage.

Intriguingly, Cicero specifically connects this religious sense to their ability to perceive the role of the gods in everyday life: it is not even to worship that Cicero draws attention. Rather, it is the ability of Romans to detect the will of the gods that is special, a special ability to read, if you will, the messages of the gods that are made known to man. This relates, of course, to the notable Roman practice of recording lists of prodigies, exemplified by the lists Livy copied into his history. As Tom Holland narrates, “Showers of blood, chasms spitting fire, mice eating gold: terrifying prodigies such as these were regarded as the equivalent of bailiffs’ duns, warnings to the Roman people that they stood in arrears with the gods.”³ We should rightly connect Cicero’s idea of Roman wisdom at perception to the noting and expiation of these types of prodigies. J.A. North provides a succinct and also respectful summary of Roman dealings with prodigies,

² Cicero, *On the Response of the Haruspices*, 19.

³ Tom Holland, *Rubicon* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 3-4.

arguing that instead of simplistic views of monsters meaning the gods are angry and will be placated by offerings, “we should recognize a network of human failings, of events seen as exceeding natural limits, and gods needing repayment.”⁴ There is very much a relational aspect to this, as the Romans have a natural connection with the gods that allows them to understand the will of the gods and make things right again when they go bad.

This is not the only time Cicero makes such a statement, either. In his *Tusculan Disputations*, he once again confidently asserts that Romans are superior to other peoples in their connection with the gods. While Greeks may be superior in some cultural aspects such as philosophy, they are not as virtuous or religious: “Now these things which by nature, and not by letters, are grasped, neither with Greece nor with any other people are we comparable. For who has displayed such gravity, who such constancy, such greatness of soul, honesty, faith – where has such excellent virtue been found in any race, that they might be comparable with our ancestors?”⁵ Once again, we see that Cicero is attempting to identify defining characteristics for different people groups. He identifies Greeks as those especially gifted in learned arts, but sees Romans as identified by, among other things, their virtue and faith – their connection to the gods. Indeed, we should not disconnect virtue from religion in the ancient world: as Jorg Rupke notes, “The gods did take an interest in the moral behaviour of the individual . . . right-minded and ‘pious’ behaviour (involving much more than just getting the ritual rules right) are appreciated by the gods and rewarded by having one’s prayers rapidly answered.”⁶

⁴ J.A. North, *Roman Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39-40.

⁵ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I.2.

⁶ Jorg Rupke, *Religion of the Romans*, Trans. by Richard Gordon (Malden: Polity Press, 2007), 15. Rupke specifically notes the importance of the Latin word *fides*, which translates to good faith or trustworthiness that brings about the right of protection. This word is appears, for instance, in Livy’s description of Numa’s reign, where Livy writes that Numa’s religious reforms inspired the Roman people to outstanding *fides*. Rupke also asserts that the gods were especially interested in behavior specifically affecting the gods themselves, such as blasphemy, temple robbing, or the breaking of oaths. For examples of these sins, see the fates of many of the Greeks after sacking Troy in the *Aeneid*, such as Ajax the Lesser, who is killed by Minerva for profaning her temple.

Further evidence of the importance of religion to Roman identity during the Republican period comes from the open nature of Rome's pantheon. As Rupke points out, Roman religion is quite different from Greek, with a more equal setting for all the gods in contrast to the clear hierarchies in Greece. Meanwhile, Greek mythology is filled with stories of the deeds of an established pantheon, while "Roman stories about gods emphasize new divinities that were introduced at various times."⁷ It was important for Romans to recognize all the gods and bring them into Roman religious practice when they were discovered – after all, this was Cicero's claim, that the Romans were exceptional at ascertaining the will of the gods, which first requires one to recognize the gods. Rupke further argues that this Roman attitude toward religion is similar to the way Romans viewed their own society – "endowed with a highly-developed ability to integrate new-comers, and long able successfully to resist the exorbitant ambitions of its individual members."⁸ By this reading, Rome's religious openness can be read as the model for the expansion of its citizenship and durable Republican structures based on checks and balances. While Rupke wonders if the pantheon was modeled on Roman society, it is equally plausible to argue that Romans modeled their society on this imagined open pantheon. As has been noted, the third century BC was the "highpoint of innovation" and importation, while Roman society attempted to cordon off Romans from other peoples, even some of their nearest Italian allies, until the Social War in the late Republic.⁹

Meanwhile, other scholars have also identified a centrally religious nature of Roman identity as far back as the fourth century BC. Emmanuele Curti argues that in the wake of the Struggle of the Orders, "Rome as a city had to regenerate itself, finding new political solutions

⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume I, A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 84.

and a new political vocabulary to construct a new identity: religion can actually provide interesting evidence of such a transformation.”¹⁰ Religion came to serve as social glue in Roman society that had been shattered and overturned by the dramatic events of the Struggle of the Orders. Bispham notes that “this is nothing less than the creation of a new sort of community.”¹¹ This new community relied on changes in Roman religion – festivals on the calendar, temple-building projects, and other methods – to legitimate the new society in which the plebeian class had gained so much more power than it had ever held. For instance, the deity Concordia was dedicated in the Forum during this time, a newly deified personification of the idea of peace, representing the new era of peace between patrician and plebeian. Other abstract concepts such as Honos (Honor), Victoria (Victory), and Salus (Salvation or Safety) were all deified and added to the ritual calendar at this time, an influx of plebeian values. Similarly, new temples were built on the Quirinal Hill, which Curti argues were designed to be duplicate the old temples on the Capitoline to represent a new Rome built upon the unity of patrician and plebeian rather than patrician dominance and plebeian weakness.

Among modern scholars, Duncan Fishwick in particular sees evidence of a sacral nature of Roman identity in the Republic, noting the strong connection between Jupiter Optimus Maximus and the state. Even “under the Republic Jupiter Optimus Maximus was represented on earth by the magistrate of the people, which stood collectively under the patronage of the god who had chosen Rome to rule the world.” He thus sees continuity between the Late Republic and the early Principate, as he argues that in both periods “the preservation of the commonwealth was inextricably tied to the cult of Jupiter at the Capitoline temple, the fulcrum of national

¹⁰ Emanuele Curti, “From Concordia to the Quirinal,” in Bispham and Smith, eds., *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 79-90.

¹¹ Bispham and Smith, *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, 11.

consciousness.”¹² This connection continued into the Augustan Age, as Augustus was constantly compared to Jupiter, described as his regent, and even assimilated into Jupiter via his own deification and assumption of central religious rites.¹³

It is difficult to find evidence of this religious conception of Roman identity among Republican historians, primarily because so few survive. Of all the historians of the era, only the works of Diodorus Siculus, a Greek writer of a universal history that is notable for the great attention it pays to Egypt, survive in anything more than fragments. The works of, for instance, Lucius Cornelius Sisenna, considered the greatest late Republican historian by later writers praising him, are completely lost, along with the majority of Sallust’s histories, written as a continuation of Sisenna’s work. Scholars today believe that an annalist named Valerius Antias was the source of Livy’s prodigy lists in his own history, and so it is at least possible that Antias might have provided further support for the idea of religion’s importance at Republican Rome. However, Antias’ history is also lost, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to perfectly isolate individual sections of Livy’s history to determine what specifically came from Antias.¹⁴

2.2 *Lack of Sacrality*

Despite clear evidence for the existence of a tradition that viewed Roman identity as centered on religion during the Republic, there is also a large amount of evidence that this mode of thinking was not particularly prevalent. While there were instances and Romans who viewed Roman identity as based on a particularly close relationship with the gods, there were strong competing traditions during this time period that attributed no particularly special relationship

¹² Duncan Fishwick, “On the Temple of Divus Augustus,” *Phoenix* 46, no. 3 (1992): 239.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 240-242.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 217-221.

between the Romans and the gods, no more than that of other nations in the world. “Rome had its own religion, a public cult that had meaning and validity only within Rome’s frontiers,” writes Olivier de Cazanove. “The reverse is equally true: the Romans had no need to appeal to the divinities of cities or *ethnoi* other than their own.”¹⁵ Rome had its religion just as other peoples had theirs; other people had similar relationships to the gods as the Romans did, meaning that any special claim to relationship with the gods would be irrelevant for Roman identity, as it would fail to differentiate Romans from other peoples in their world.

There is a strong current in Republican discourse focusing on the foreignness of particular religious practices. An especially prominent example is the literature on *haruspices*, the priests who studied the entrails of ritually slaughtered animals. *Haruspices* were associated with Etruscan religious practice, and not in the sense of being part of Rome’s heritage; rather, they were seen as literally foreign. As scholars have noted, Romans had a different idea of the relationship between Romans and Etruscans than modern archaeologists do. Archaeologists now insist that Rome and Etruria had a common culture from at least the sixth century BC, but to Romans in the late Republic, Etruscans were foreign. Their religious traditions were distinct from traditional Roman religious practices, and perhaps some even attributed them power because of their exotic nature.¹⁶ Romans during the Republic never fully incorporated haruspicy into their own religious tradition, seeing it as something external to their own practice even if they occasionally made use of it; Beard, North, and Price note that the *haruspices* were never organized into a formal Roman priestly college the way every other group was. This is indeed significant; an important part of a claim to a unique relationship with the gods as defining the community is the need for stronger incorporation of recognized religious practices than this. The

¹⁵ Olivier de Cazanove, trans by Edward Bispham, “Some Thoughts on the ‘Religious Romanisation’ of Italy before the Social War,” in Bispham and Smith, *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome*, 71.

¹⁶ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 20.

implication of the Roman understanding of haruspicy is that it is actually the Etruscans who in this case have the special relationship with the gods; the Romans merely take advantage of Etruscan skill when needed.

It is interesting to note that in Republican writings there is evidence not only of the foreignness of haruspicy, but even distrust and skepticism concerning these foreign religious practices. Cato the Elder in particular is noteworthy for negative sentiments toward Etruscan haruspicy. In *On Agriculture*, he writes that the overseer of the country estate “must not consult a *haruspex*, augur, soothsayer, or Chaldaean.”¹⁷ Cato demonstrates a lack of respect for the predictions of foreign religious experts for Rome. Romans have no need for the contributions of external religious practices. Cicero reports that Cato made further statements concerning haruspices, noting “that old saying of Cato is widely known: ‘I am astonished,’ he said, ‘that a *haruspex* does not laugh whenever he sees another *haruspex*.’ For how many things, whatever they may be, happened as predicted by them? Or, if any whatsoever happened, what reason can be brought forward why it did not just happen so by chance?”¹⁸ Cato is frequently noted as the Roman *par excellence*, and yet here he is reported to have absolutely no respect for religious practices concerned with predicting the future, precisely those practices mentioned by Cicero as a source of Roman greatness, as interpretations of *haruspices* were commonly cited as prodigies, which the Romans were supposed to be so superior in recognizing and expiating. Yet Cato rejects the entire venture out of hand. Other Romans are also noted for ignoring the *haruspices*, notably Julius Caesar, who, according to Cicero, “disregarded the warning of a *haruspex* not to cross the sea to Africa before the winter solstice, noting that if he had not done so [ignored the

¹⁷ Cato, *On Agriculture*, 5.4.

¹⁸ Cicero, *On Divination*, II.24.51-2.

warning] all his enemies would have gathered against him in one place.”¹⁹ It is interesting that these citations come from Cicero, the very writer who notes so stridently in other writings that Romans actually were exceptionally pious and mindful of such divine messages.

Further evidence of the relative unimportance of religion to Roman identity comes, ironically, in a notable passage that argues for the importance of religion to Rome. In Book VI of his *Histories*, Polybius spends a chapter on Roman religion after his long discussion of constitutions. The passage is worth quoting at length:

But the quality in which the Roman commonwealth is most distinctly superior is in my opinion the nature of their religious convictions. I believe that it is the very thing which among other peoples is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman state. These matters are clothed in such pomp and introduced to such an extent into their public and private life that nothing could exceed it, a fact which will surprise many. My own opinion at least is that they have adopted this course for the sake of the common people. It is a course which perhaps would not have been necessary had it been possible to form a state composed of wise men, but as every multitude is fickle, full of lawless desires, unreasoned passion, and violent anger, the multitude must be held in by invisible terrors and suchlike pageantry. For this reason I think, not that the ancients acted rashly and at haphazard in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but that the moderns are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs. The consequence is that among the Greeks, apart from other things, members of the government, if they are entrusted with no more than a talent, though they have ten copyists and as many seals and twice as many witnesses, cannot keep their faith; whereas among the Romans those who as magistrates and legates are dealing with large sums of money maintain correct conduct just because they have pledged their faith by oath. Whereas elsewhere it is a rare thing to find a man who keeps his hands off public money, and whose record is clean in this respect, among the Romans one rarely comes across a man who has been detected in such conduct.²⁰

On first glance, this passage provides powerful evidence for the importance of religion to Roman identity; after all, Polybius cites it as “maintaining the cohesion of the Roman state” and their most superior quality. However, what is also interesting upon closer inspection of this passage is

¹⁹ Valerie M. Warrior, *Roman Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51-2.

²⁰ Polybius, *Histories*, VI.56.6-15. Trans. by W.R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927).

the way that Polybius is very careful to state, multiple times in the brief passage, that he is giving his opinion here, after not giving any such disclaimers in his passage on the Roman constitution immediately preceding it. He goes out of his way to make it clear that what he is saying is his own perspective, implying that it might not be the perspective of Romans themselves. It is important that he is writing his *Histories* for a Greek audience; it is his experience with Greek culture that leads him to note the significant role religion plays. He makes this grand point about Roman religion in the course of making an explicit contrast with Greece, where he sees religion being rejected as useless. Rather than giving any statement about how Romans view their religion, Polybius is making a political statement about its social utility, and how it might benefit contemporary Greeks to find similar uses for their own religious practices. The way Polybius openly editorializes in this section leads one to believe that it is likely that contemporary Romans left religion undertheorized during this time period; it was perhaps a given category, assumed, not deeply thought about as central to Roman identity. Some scholars concur that this is likely, arguing that it is only the last century BC that Romans began explicitly theorizing and scrutinizing religion.²¹

Religious practices written about by Augustan writers as important parts of Roman life, such as religious rituals for war, are absent in Polybius' account. The *fetiales*, a college of Roman priests especially concerned with foreign relations, played an important role in declarations of war. As part of the formal declaration of war, the *fetiales* selected representatives of the college to go to the border of the enemy's territory and throw a ritual spear into the enemy territory. Later in Roman history, Romans fulfilled this ritual obligation by having an enemy hostage purchase a plot of land in Rome; the *fetiales* would then go to this property and throw the ritual spear to declare war, saving the time and energy of traveling all the way to the enemy's

²¹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 150ff.

border, a serious consideration as Roman campaigns pushed further and further away from the city. Polybius in his history frequently mentions at least in passing many of the religious rituals engaged in by the Roman people, such as the sacrifices of Fabius after his selection as dictator. However, Polybius gives no mention to the *fetiales* playing such a role in his time; he notes when the *fetiales* give the oath for Rome at the signing of peace treaties, but does not describe this most important religious ritual involved in the declaration of war, “implying that the *fetiales* played little role in declaring war in the mid-second century B.C.E.; their importance had been revived by the time Octavian declared war on Cleopatra, if not before.”²² This would seem to indicate that it was not as important to relate everything in Roman life to religion in Polybius’ time as it was later in the Augustan Age; religion has a less important role in Republican Rome, even if it is still important in many ways.

Further support for the idea that religion did not provide a source of identity for the Roman people during the Republic is the important part played by aristocratic competition in the religious debates of the era. A common feature of the late Republic was the claim of *felicitas*, an assertion by a political figure that he had “divinely inspired good luck” which attached itself to individuals. Beard, North, and Price note that this is a distinctly pre-Principate mode of attachment to glorious individuals.²³ Leaders of different factions, such as Scipio, Marius, or Sulla, and even Cicero and Clodius, would claim that they had specifically been blessed by the gods and ought to be followed by the Roman people. What is significant here is that the connection is between individuals and the gods, not the gods and the Roman people. There is no sense that this relationship with the gods is important for the identity of the Roman people as a whole, but rather for influential individuals attempting to gain authority. The question was “with

²² Ando, *The Matter of the Gods*, 115-116.

²³ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 86.

which political leaders was their [the gods'] favour placed?"²⁴ Religion was less part of communal identity than a form of political rhetoric in many situations.

While the religious rhetoric of Cicero discussed above described Rome as superior to Greece due to its superior morality, not all, or even most Romans thought in these terms. Cicero's vision of moral superiority makes claims for continued growth and greatness, making Rome the greatest culture of the world. Elizabeth Rawson, on the other hand, argues that in the late Republic "Roman writers did not envisage any dramatic break with or advance over the Greeks. . . There was faith in the present, but not, perhaps faith in the future, at least the more distant future."²⁵ She looks at Varro, Vitruvius, Scaevola, and Cicero, and argues that they all believed they were advancing Roman knowledge in their different fields (ritual and agriculture, architecture, law, and oratory and philosophy) but that there were limits to the possible advancement. Cicero himself argues that the art of oratory is now in a state of decline in Rome, and that growth and decay are natural processes that elude nothing.²⁶ Roman writers could see decaying civilizations all around them (Rawson specifically mentions Etruria and Greece, and she argues that this led them to reject the idea of eternal power and growth – to realize the transience of Roman imperium. This lack of faith in continued growth in the future belies Cicero's vision of eternal blessing of the gods, indicating that a sacral notion of Rome was merely one possible tradition in the Roman Republic. There is nothing special about Rome in this understanding; it is just another civilization – a great one, no doubt, but not necessarily one chosen by the gods to rule the world. Indeed, the writings of Lucretius in *On the Nature of*

²⁴ Ibid., 140. See also Rupke, *Religion of the Romans*, 84-5 for a discussion of how claims of special favor from the gods by elites led to identifications with gods by freedmen on tombstones, a trend which Rupke sees as foreshadowing the imperial cult and deification of emperors, "an integral possibility of Roman polytheism" from the beginning.

²⁵ Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, 324.

²⁶ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, II.2.

Things – a work Cicero read and praised in letters to his brother Quintus - explicitly argues against any role for the gods in human life, a paradigm that is diametrically opposed to a sacral view of Roman identity.²⁷

2.3 Republican Threads of Identity

If religion is not the primary mode of identification for Romans in the Republic, then it is important to try to identify what threads were considered more important by Romans at the time. During this time period, I argue that Dench and Wallace-Hadrill have correctly identified the essential nature of Roman identity: the traditions of the *mos maiorum* and Rome's political institutions. As Gabriella Gustafsson notes, the fragments we have of Cato the Elder's *Origins* "had a strong emphasis on Italian origins, on *virtus* and *mos maiorum*."²⁸ These are certainly important elements of his *On Agriculture*, where he opens the text by praising men who work the land and do not engage in speculative trading; farming creates the bravest soldiers and the most respectable men. He specifically notes that that is how the ancient Romans did it, in an explicit appeal to the *maiores nostri*: our ancestors.²⁹ Rawson notes that the Romans wrote more about their own ancestors in historical and antiquarian research than any Greek city, with the possible exception of Athens. Romans were obsessed with traditionalism, "literally ancestor-worshippers . . . almost bound to overvalue the achievements of the *maiores*."³⁰

Rather than religion, it is Rome's political structures that provide the foundation for Roman identity during the Republican era. Wallace-Hadrill's argument that Republican identity was based on "voting and fighting" has already been noted earlier. These two elements are

²⁷ For a good edition of Lucretius' work, see Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, trans. by Frank O. Copley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977).

²⁸ Gabriella Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2000), 84.

²⁹ Cato, *On Agriculture*, 1.

³⁰ Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, 322.

indeed clearly important to Republican identity based on the way Romans treated these institutions. Voting was a closely protected right among Republican Romans. When Rome was extending its dominion over the rest of Italy, it was quite stingy with the citizenship.³¹ Although Rome originally drew from men of varied backgrounds, full citizenship rights were rarely extended further during the Republic. Many peoples were labeled *provinciales*, lacking any Roman rights or standing besides recognizing Roman control. One step up were the *socii*, or allies, who were granted certain Roman rights by treaty but lacked any actual citizenship or voting rights. Latin rights were extended to nearby peoples, and included primarily basic commercial rights but again lacked any voting rights. In rare occasions, Rome granted limited citizenship to Italians – but even here people were labeled *cives sine suffragio*, citizens without the vote. For instance, the city of Cumae in Campania was granted this level of citizenship – even when Italians were granted the full range of other Roman rights, they were still denied the right to vote. This one particular right Romans protected to the last, only extending full citizenship rights after fighting a bloody war against the Italian allies, the Social War.³² That Republican Romans so fiercely protected the right to vote indicates that it was considered especially important to them, likely because, as Wallace-Hadrill suggests, voting was one of the foundational institutions to Roman cultural identity.

Voting is not alone, though – the institution of the Roman army also shows similar signs of Roman protection that indicates its importance to Roman identity. During the Republican period, the army was composed of both the Roman legions and the auxiliary legions, the *alae*, or wings, so named because they lined up to the flanks of the Roman legions in the center. The Roman legions were only open to Roman citizens; as noted in the previous paragraph, Roman

³¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, 446.

³² The pre-eminent work on Roman citizenship remains A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

citizenship was significantly more difficult to come by in the Republican period than in later eras, so that service in the Roman legions was far more exclusive and protected, much like voting rights. The extension of *civitas sine suffragio* to some Italian cities did allow these Italians to serve in the Roman legions – it is likely that this was a practical compromise, an acknowledgement that Rome needed the manpower help. However, Rome was still obviously very protective of the institutions, based on how limited the extension of even truncated citizenship was. And of the two institutions, voting and fighting, it is not surprising that the compromise would come in the army, as Romans could at least benefit militarily from that compromise, whereas there would be no such obvious benefits to compromising on the vote. Finally, in the late Republic, Marius put an end to this exclusive Roman legion by reorganizing the Roman army to allow anyone to serve and granting full citizenship to anyone who served a full career in the legions. Even though Romans were forced to open these closed institutions in the late Republic, they held onto them for as long as possible, indicating the high position they held in Roman eyes.

It is interesting to note, however, that many elements of Roman society during this period point back at all times to political structures. A well-studied element of Roman culture during the Republic is the triumph, celebrating Roman military victories. Andrew Feldherr notes that the visual elements of the triumph serve to draw attention to “the *imperium* and *auspicium* responsible for the successes that the triumph celebrated,” which stem from the Republic’s political structures. The triumph of the general is the triumph of the Republican system and its *imperium* granted to the general.³³ This trend of connecting everything to political institutions is

³³ Andrew Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy’s History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 25. See also Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 63; she argues specifically that the triumphs shifted over the course of the Republic to become less and less about gratitude to the gods and more about celebrating the triumphant general; her

continued in the writings of Sallust, as he sought to analyze the failings of the late Republic. Scholars argue that Sallust sees historical writing as an alternative means of attaining glory to entering politics, and that historical writing was actually the better way of benefiting his fellow-Romans when compared to politics due to the current noxious political environment.³⁴ Sallust writes, “Both those who act and those who write about these deeds are greatly praised. . . . When I was a young man at the start of my career, filled with zeal, I was brought like many others into politics, but there were many obstacles opposing me there. For in place of honor, in place of temperance, in place of virtue, impudence, extravagance, and greed flourished.”³⁵ The focus once again is on the political institutions: Sallust directly connects the chaos of the late Republic with breakdowns in Rome’s political structures rather than religious problems, as Augustan writers will in later decades (see chapter five). The greatest honor he can achieve comes in politics, not in serving the gods; his historical writings, furthermore, are an explicit way of remembering the past, both the actions of the *maiores* that are so central to Roman identity at this time as well as the actions of contemporary Romans who, by ignoring the *mores maiorum*, are destroying the *res publica*. Sallust writes both to preserve what is good as well as point out the faults of men of his own day, and in both cases he is concerned more with civic institutions and traditions than anything else.

Some of the most powerful examples of the centrality of Roman political institutions to identity in the Republic come from the writings of Polybius. In the famous Book VI of his *Histories*, Polybius analyzes the Roman constitution, which he sees as “the best of all existing

vision of the triumph’s focus is different than Feldherr’s, but both agree that the focus is not on the gods, but on either the state itself or its successful agents.

³⁴ Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society*, 28.

³⁵ Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, 3.1,3.

constitutions.”³⁶ The constitution is everything to Polybius, who argues that Rome’s “triple” constitution, comprising elements of all three forms of good government – monarchy in the consuls, aristocracy in the Senate, and democracy in the assemblies – allows it to survive anything. He writes:

For whenever the menace of some common danger from abroad compels them to act in concord and support each other, so great does the strength of the state become, that nothing which is requisite can be neglected, as all are zealously competing in devising means of meeting the need of the hour, nor can any decision arrived at fail to be executed promptly, as all are co-operating both in public and in private to the accomplishment of the task which they have set themselves; and consequently this peculiar form of constitution possesses an irresistible power of attaining every object upon which it is resolved.³⁷

Polybius engages in this digression on the Roman constitution after narrating the disaster of the battle of Cannae. In light of this, when Polybius describes how the constitution allows Romans to accomplish any task in the face of menaces from dangers from abroad, it is clear that he is arguing that it was the Roman constitution and the political structures it supported that enabled Rome to survive the greatest series of massacres in military history. When backed against a metaphorical wall (and physically inside the walls of Rome), Romans relied on institutional strength to hold them all together. These factors that people go to for unity in times of crisis are likely to represent the most important parts of collective identity: when everything else has been taken away, people fall back on the core features that identify them as a people. By engaging in such a long analysis of the Roman constitution while describing just such a crisis, Polybius implicitly makes clear where he stands on the question of the core features of Roman identity.

³⁶ Polybius, *Histories*, VI.10.14.

³⁷ Ibid., VI.18.2-4.

Polybius's lengthy discussion of the Roman constitution presents the positive example in his argument on the importance of political institutions to Roman identity. In Book IV, however, he provides an implied contrast with the Romans in his discussion of the Eleans. He states that "some of the Eleans in fact are so fond of country life, that though men of substance, they have not for two or three generations shown their faces in the law-courts."³⁸ The contrast with Rome is clear, as Polybius praises the Roman constitution for involving all members of the Roman people in the political workings of the Republic through its triple nature. And while this universal engagement provides strength for Rome and a source of identity to fall back on in the face of danger, the Eleans "simply from fear of rare and improbable perils . . . expose their country and their properties to constant war and devastation" by their continued uninvolvedness in politics and military service.³⁹ As the Eleans' political institutions do not provide any kind of focal point for identity, they are in constant danger from menaces far less imposing than those that Rome has been able to survive. While Elis is being overrun by power-hungry neighbors, Rome is able to survive the threat of Hannibal's army raging outside the walls and all over Italy for 16 years.

The significance of Rome's political structures during this time period is exemplified by the centrality of Romulus in Roman myth and history during the Republic. As Andrew Erskine notes, "Extant Republican literature emphasizes Romulus rather than the Trojans. Romulus was more embedded in the self-image of the Roman state. He was the father of the country. . . Romulus features in Cicero's speeches, whether they are to the upper classes or to the People."⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., IV.73.7

³⁹ Ibid., IV.74.4-8.

⁴⁰ Andrew Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36. Erskine goes on to argue that Republican literature is far less interested in the Trojan myth than our sources indicate, as Augustan writers who cited Republican authors were selective in their citations rather than representative: they were more likely to cull quotes concerning Trojan roots of Rome, causing these fragments to be overrepresented in the remaining literature compared to the original contents of Republican texts. For example, the first book of Cato's

Romulus was depicted on Roman coinage, and the famous image of Romulus and Remus with the wolf had already been in Rome for centuries. For instance, Erskine is able to construct a long list of references to Romulus in all kinds of speeches, whereas there is only one reference to Aeneas in all of Cicero's extant speeches and any references to Troy whatsoever are limited to speeches to the upper class.⁴¹ This is significant, as the Aeneas myth and connections to Troy are rich sources for Rome's sacral nature, as shall be shown in the next chapter; the fact that these connections are relatively ignored by Republican Romans in favor of the contributions of Romulus, the founder of Rome's political institutions, implies that it was these political contributions that were viewed as more important to Roman identity than those of the Trojans or even later figures associated with religious institutions such as Numa Pompilius.⁴² As Erskine puts it, "the myth [of Trojan roots] had little to offer, because the Romans already had a founder, Romulus. The history of their city, therefore, started with Romulus, whereas Aeneas and the Trojans were part of what could be called prehistory."⁴³ This is in stark contrast to the historical strategy of Augustan writers, who always go back to Trojan roots to begin any history of Rome; Aeneas is not viewed as some kind of prehistory, but rather an integral part of Roman history by these later writers. It is doubtful even that Romans felt much connection at all to Trojans in much of the Republican period; in the play *Bacchides*, Plautus directly parodies the Trojan War "and in a long and delightful lyrical passage the slave Chrysalus compares his own achievements

Origins survives in fragments that largely concern Troy, yet Cornelius Nepos' summary of the book mentions nothing of Troy, but rather simply states that the book "included the achievements of the kings of the Roman People," (p. 28) fitting with the importance of Romulus to Republican Rome. Rather than seeing Nepos as missing an important part of the text, Erskine argues that Nepos indicates the true original contents of the work, while our fragments are unbalanced in favor of a very minor part of the book.

⁴¹ Ibid., n.94. The list of speeches using Romulus as a rhetorical call to action includes the *Pro Rabirio*, *In Catilinam*, *Pro Balbo*, and *In Vatinius*. Aeneas appears only in *In Verrem*.

⁴² Erskine notes on pp. 30-31 that whenever Cicero uses examples from Troy and the Aeneas myth in his speeches, he is very careful to give explicit descriptions of the event he is mentioning, unlike his assumption of common knowledge when he makes reference to Romulus or figures from Republican history. The myth of Trojan origins appears to be circulating during the era, but was not widely known in any level of detail, even by upper-class Romans.

⁴³ Ibid., 37.

with those of the Greek heroes who conquered Troy” as he successfully extorts money from his old master, Nicobulus, to help his young master Mnesilochus get money to buy the woman he loves, a prostitute named Bacchis.⁴⁴ The monologue encompasses the entirety of Act IV Scene 9 in the play. In this scenario, the audience is clearly meant to root for Chrysalus as he triumphs over Nicobulus, whom he explicitly compares to Priam and even the city of Troy itself. After giving Nicobulus a note to fool him into giving up the money, Chrysalus gloats, “I am Ulysses, by whose counsel they do these things. Then the letters that are written here are the soldiers inside this horse, armed and well-spirited. . . . To this stupid old man of ours I truly give the name ‘Ilium;’ the captain is Menelaus and I am Agamemnon; and I am also Ulysses son of Laertes.”⁴⁵ Rather than presenting the sack of Troy from a Trojan perspective, Plautus, as a second-century BC Roman, gives a Greek point of view, even if in just a parodic form. This is in stark contrast to Vergil’s explicitly Trojan point of view, as shall be seen in the next chapter.

⁴⁴ Minna Skafte Jensen, “The Fall of Troy in Plautus’ *Bacchides*,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* 48 (1997): 315. See also Erskine, *Troy Between Greece and Rome*, 33.

⁴⁵ Plautus, *Bacchides*, IV.ix.16-18, 21-22.

3 Augustan Views of Myth and Ancient History

Having established that Roman identity in the Republican era was centered not on religion but on *mos maiorum* and political institutions, it is now possible to turn to the Augustan age. We shall argue that during this period, there was a comprehensive re-imagining of Roman identity based on religion, the special relationship between the Roman people and the gods. While many writers made cases based on recent events, some of the most powerful examples of this phenomenon come from writings dealing with the most distant past – the founding of Rome and, even further back, the mythological world. Even writers such as the geographer Strabo showed great concern for mythology. As Katherine Clark describes Strabo's work, his "concern was with the present identity of individual places, made up of stories about the past, and that this resulted in a concentration on moments of foundation, migration, and transformation. . . these preoccupations are reflected in his broad use of mythological indicators of time, such as the Trojan war and the migration of heroes."¹ For example, in chapter 7 of Book VIII, Strabo's discussion of Ionia, he opens by recapitulating the Hellenic genealogy to present the background of the Ionians (descendants of Ion, the son of Xanthus and grandson of Hellen, as well as the nephew of Dorus, eponymous ancestor of the Dorians). This family tree at the outset of the book both tells how the Ionians came to Ionia – they traveled from Athens due to overpopulation – but also demonstrates how the Ionians are related to other branches of Greeks. They are closely related to the Athenians, as they were originally all in Athens until many were forced to leave due to crowding, and are rivals of the Dorians and Achaeans.² It is an obvious application of Hall's analysis of the use of the Hellenic genealogy discussed in the introduction. The most widely known and celebrated collection of myths in Rome comes from Ovid, while several

¹ Katherine Clarke, *Between Geography and History* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1999), 325.

² Strabo, *Geography*, VIII.vii.1.

writers, including Vergil, Livy, and Ovid again, took on the task of revisiting the foundations of Rome.

3.1 Roman Mythology

It is vitally important to look at the body of myths presented in Augustan Rome, as they are more than simply retellings of Greek tales with Roman names attached to the gods. As Rupke notes, “The written form conserves and multiplies such variants, which can also take on critical functions. As a body, myths become a store of signs, which through deliberate recombination can be used as a medium in which to think alternate possibilities.”³ The ways that transmitters of myth select the stories they will tell and organize them to form a coherent whole are significant to understanding the message the writer wishes to convey. Individual myths present lessons and morals (as well as entertain their audience), but the grand collection and narrative of a compendium of myths can present an overarching theme. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* provide just such an example; the many tales of changes present their own lessons amid entertainment, while the juxtaposition of myths and presence of recurring themes give the work deeper meaning. Looking at the big picture in *Metamorphoses*, it becomes clear that one of Ovid’s main purposes is to illustrate the importance of recognizing and respecting the gods, which results in reward, while failure to do these things results in punishment and destruction.

An early example of this theme in *Metamorphoses* occurs at the very beginning of the text, as Ovid details the events leading up to and following the great flood. Jove feels compelled to destroy the earth after being shocked by the impiety of mankind after Lycaon’s feast (of a murdered child), telling his fellow gods, “It would be a long time, so many evils are found everywhere, to describe them all: the terrible reports themselves were insignificant compared to

³ Rupke, *Religion of the Romans*, 128.

the truth.”⁴ The other gods all agree, whether explicitly or by tacit assent, but it is interesting that the concern that Ovid has the gods express over the destruction of mankind does not regard the taking of men’s lives, but that men will no longer bring incense to the gods’ altars.⁵ The implication is that this is the purpose of mankind – to serve the gods. This, then, is what it is supposed to mean to be human.

Of course, an interesting parallel can be drawn here between *Metamorphoses*’ implicit definition of humanity and a trend among Roman writers of this age: Augustine in his critique of Varro’s *Antiquities* points out that Varro frequently uses “human” to stand for simply “Roman.” Whenever he is discussing supposedly universal themes, he only uses examples from Roman history and culture, Roman places and names.⁶ In the *Antiquities*, Varro opened by putting his books on human affairs before his books on divine affairs. Augustine notes, “If it is too much that some divine part of the universe were to be put before human things, at least it is more worthy than Roman affairs. But to be sure, his books of human affairs do not go as far as the whole orb of the world, but only pertain to Rome alone.”⁷ We should be willing to consider that Ovid might be making a similar rhetorical move: describing *Romanitas* in the guise of describing mankind. This may stem from a confidence in Roman superiority: Romans are the greatest people on earth, so they are therefore those who most closely fit the ideal definition of what it is to be human. As the Romans had conquered the Mediterranean and seemed poised for greater imperial conquests in Germany and Parthia during Augustus’ reign, it is natural that Romans would have seen themselves as the paragons of humanity based on their success: they were obviously doing something right, so they must have hit closest of any people on earth to

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I.214-215.

⁵ Ibid., I.246-249.

⁶ Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, 237.

⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, VI.4.

fulfilling the purpose of human existence. These kinds of hints as to the true nature of mankind, then, may be critical to understanding Roman identity during this period. That Ovid draws attention immediately and repeatedly to religion is surely significant.

After the destruction of the human race, the only people remaining are Deucalion and Pyrrha. Jupiter's rage subsides when he observes that on landing at Mount Parnassus, "Here they worshipped the Corcyran nymphs and the gods of the mountain and the prophetic Themis, who then held oracular power. No man lived better or more righteous than he, nor any woman more fearful of the gods than she." Ovid further describes Deucalion and Pyrrha as "innocent and devout;" it is not the most clever, the wisest, or the strongest that is saved but the most pious.⁸ Ovid's account of Deucalion and Pyrrha is perhaps the oldest text we have reporting this myth (depending on the date of the *Library* of Pseudo-Apollodorus); older Greek texts mentioning Deucalion say nothing about a deluge or about his piety saving him. Dionysius of Halicarnassus is representative of the extant Greek writings, naming him as the son of Prometheus and a successful military leader driving the Pelasgians from Thessaly.⁹ He is mentioned in Greek works as generally reverent and the father of Hellen, the ancestor of all Greeks in the Hellenic genealogy, but there seems to be little evidence that the story of Deucalion's Flood was an especially widespread or important story. In fact, according to Augustine, Varro, the greatest of all Roman antiquarians, claimed that the flood was named Deucalion's Flood not because he was saved from it, but because the flood only occurred in those regions ruled by Deucalion.¹⁰ That Ovid makes it the center point of Book I of the *Metamorphoses*, the narrative climax of the book after the story of Creation and before getting

⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphose*, I.318-323, 326.

⁹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, I.17.3. Trans. by Earnest Cary (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XVIII.10.

into individual myths such as Apollo and Daphne, indicates that the flood serves an important purpose for the message of the entire work.

Further emphasizing the importance of piety, Ovid gives a repeat performance of this flood narrative with piety bringing salvation, later, in Book VIII of *Metamorphoses*. The story of Baucis and Philemon echoes the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, as once again Jupiter resolves to destroy men due to their impiety, while the piety of one couple spares their lives. This time, Jupiter and Mercury disguise themselves as mortals and seek rest with the inhabitants of a region of Phrygia. “A thousand homes they came to, seeking rest; a thousand homes were bolted shut.”¹¹ Only one old couple, Baucis and Philemon, open their home to the gods, preparing a meal for them and even attempting, in a comical scene, to kill their only goose for supper. After thus demonstrating their hospitality, a virtue required by the gods, Jupiter and Mercury reveal themselves: “They said, ‘We are gods, and this impious area earns destruction. You have been granted immunity from this evil. Just leave your house and walk with our protection and go together up that arduous mountain.’”¹² The gods punish the impious inhabitants by turning the entire region into a watery swamp, destroying everything but Baucis and Philemon’s house which has been transformed into a temple, and the pious couple is rewarded with the gift of serving the gods as priests. The myth clearly evokes Deucalion’s Flood, with an almost identical narrative structure, the exception being that Baucis and Philemon are saved before the flood, while Deucalion and Pyrrha miraculously survive the first action of their flood, and subsequently inspire Jupiter to cease the flood already in-progress. But in both cases, one pious couple is spared, while the wicked remainder is destroyed. Ovid concludes the story with the editorial

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII.629-630.

¹² Ibid., VIII.692-696.

remark provided by the narrator of this particular story, Lelex: “May they whom the gods care for be gods themselves, and may those who worship the gods be worshipped.”¹³

While these stories provide positive examples of how pious behavior leads to salvation, *Metamorphoses* is filled with stories of how impiety and failure to recognize and honor the gods leads to punishment. Of course, the most dominant theme of *Metamorphoses* is change, as evidenced by the near-universality of changes in shape in the collected myths, but a large portion of the myths concern change caused by impiety, a far more recurring theme than any of the other sources of change in the myths. The framing device of Book IV is the punishment of those who refuse to recognize the divinity of Bacchus and honor him as he ought, even after his demonstrations of power in Book III with the death of Pentheus. Even as the rest of the Thebans worship Bacchus, “Alcithoe the daughter of Minyas does not deem the rites of the god acceptable, but even has the temerity to hold that Bacchus is not the son of Jove, and she holds this impiety together with her sisters.”¹⁴ Remaining home to work on their weaving during Bacchus’ feast while they tell stories to one another, the daughters of Minyas are suddenly transformed into bats, clearly in punishment for failing to recognize divinity.¹⁵

Nor is the theme reserved for punishing failure to recognize the divinity of new (in the sense of young) gods. The punishments of Arachne and Niobe, one after the other in Book VI, reflect punishments for failing to sufficiently honor the gods, even when they are recognized. Niobe in particular sees no reason “to withdraw from boasting to the gods and to humble herself

¹³ Ibid., VIII.727.

¹⁴ Ibid., IV.1-4.

¹⁵ Ibid., IV.389-415. Interestingly, Bacchus’ step-mother Ino is also punished later in Book IV for elevating Bacchus above the other gods, particularly insulting Juno. The lesson we should take is that we should certainly recognize all the gods and honor them, but never at the expense of other gods: the Roman pantheon is open, as mentioned earlier, and the addition of Bacchus or any particular god does not require the lessening of any other divinity.

before them.”¹⁶ Pridefully comparing her fourteen children to Latona’s two, Niobe’s children are all struck down by Latona until she has none remaining. Niobe fails to respect the distinction between gods and men, and her failure to honor divinity leads to destruction. Likewise, Acmon, a soldier of Diomedes, is transformed into a bird after an angry, bitter speech in which he insists there is no point in prayer to Minerva, as there is nothing more she can do to harm Diomedes’ men. Acmon insists prayer is only important “as long as we fear something worse may come,” and that there is no need for piety outside of necessity. He taunts Minerva, saying, “Let her hear this, and, because she does, let her hate all the men under Diomedes; we all scorn her hatred: and great power is with us in this great hate.”¹⁷ His irreverence for the gods and lack of understanding about the importance of piety is quickly corrected by divine punishment.

An intriguing example is provided by the story of Scylla and Minos during the latter’s siege of Megara. Scylla, the daughter of King Nisus of Megara, falls in love with Minos and is willing to betray her city to be with him. The way she phrases her offer and Minos’ response demonstrate the importance Ovid here places on the connection between the community and their gods. Scylla tells Minos, “Love compels this deed. . . To you I surrender the gods of my fatherland. I ask no recompense except you.” Rather than showing any gratitude to Scylla for her assistance, Minos is horrified at her actions, and exclaims, “May the gods drive you away, O disgrace of our age! May the world itself, and the earth and sea deny you! Certainly I will not allow such a monster to infect the cradle of Jove, Crete, which is my home!”¹⁸ Scylla violates the connection between the community and its gods, surrendering them to an outsider for her own gain; this is the ultimate evil, so much so that Minos wants no one who would sever that link in his own kingdom. If we connect this myth with Ovid’s contemporary society, the

¹⁶ Ibid., VI.151.

¹⁷ Ibid., XIV.486-493.

¹⁸ Ibid., VIII.90-100.

implication is that it is the link between the community and the gods that defines Rome: this is the one bond that must never be broken.

An important question for this study, of course, is to what degree we can connect Ovid's work with Augustus and, by extension, the other writers of the Augustan Age who were more explicitly pro-Augustus. Ovid, famously, was exiled by Augustus, presumably due to his work *Ars Amatoria*. As a result, many people see Ovid as outside the realm of other Augustan writers, many of whom were either directly part of Augustus' circle or else more clearly aligned with his ideology. Alessandro Barchiesi, on the other hand, more closely aligns Ovid and Augustus. As he notes, the *Ars amatoria* "was not banned until nearly ten years after its publication – and it is for this very reason that the act of punishment appears arbitrary, persecutory, self-satisfied, and cruel in its delayed effect."¹⁹ The reason for Ovid's complaints against Augustus during his exile, and even his initial disagreement that caused the problem in the first place, were over the politicization of sexual mores and arbitrary punishment, not a fundamental disagreement over Augustus' identity ideology. At that level, it would appear by analyzing his writings such as the *Metamorphoses* as we have done here, Ovid seems more closely aligned with the *princeps* and the other thinkers of his day, rather than a grand counter-culturalist. In fact, Barchiesi argues that the entirety of Ovid's work while in exile can be seen as attempts to not only gain favor with Augustus so as to be allowed back in Rome but even to evolve "in the direction of a courtly type of position."²⁰ While Ovid never ignores the general public in his works (and indeed his works are directly addressed to the public rather than the emperor individually), his eye was always on becoming a part of that inner circle, and his work both before and during exile fit well with the dominant identity paradigm of the Augustan era.

¹⁹ Alessandro Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

3.2 Trojan Roots

During the Augustan age, the myth of Rome's Trojan ancestry gained a new level of importance. The reason for this is the connection of the Trojan myth to the Julian family. As noted before, the Republic was marked by aristocratic competition, as different families advocated different visions of *Romanitas*. The Scipio's looked to adopt elements of Greek culture, while many of the Cato's were staunch advocates of traditionalism, the *mos maiores*. The Julians, on the other hand, pushed a more religious vision of Roman identity based on their Trojan roots. While many scholars assume that the myth of Trojan origins was essential to Roman identity by the early third century at the latest,²¹ as we have noted before Erskine convincingly argues that for earlier writers, "Aeneas was relevant but marginal." It was only with the Augustan age that Aeneas became so important, and the source problem stemming from the fact that most of our Republican texts only exist in fragments cited in Augustan and later sources means that "the Augustan age seriously warps the evidence for earlier Roman representations of the Trojan myth, both Greek and Roman. In no way are these neutral citations."²²

The Aeneas myth was the special provenance of the Julians due to their claimed descent from Aeneas through his son or grandson (depending on the version of the story), Iulus. The Julians aggressively promoted the myth, encouraging its portrayal in literature and using it in architecture and currency. At the latest, the Julians pushed the story into popular consciousness

²¹ See, for instance, Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, 295. Erich Gruen advocates the early third century, Momigliano the early fourth century, Grant the fifth or fourth, Alföldi the sixth.

²² Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome*, 26, 30.

by the 30s, if not using it much earlier.²³ Octavian minted coins as early as 42 BC portraying himself on one side, with the iconic image of Aeneas carrying his father Anchises on the back, and his “placing [statues of] the Iulii opposite the rest of Rome’s great men [in the Forum of Augustus] asserted the superiority of the Iulii, and the presence of Aeneas and his family among them justified that superiority.”²⁴ As the Julians came to dominate Roman society in the late first century, they used the Trojan myth to explain their superiority and nature, stemming from the man they credited as Rome’s ultimate founder – Aeneas, rather than Romulus.

Having noted the importance of the Aeneas myth to the Julians, it is also important to analyze its contents. Studying the Trojan myth demonstrates that the Julians’ vision of *Romanitas* was rooted in religion, seeing Romans as ultimately connected in a special way with the gods – and the Julians had the most special connection of all. Before looking to the most famous example of the Trojan myth in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, it might be useful to quickly look at Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ presentation of the ancestry of the Julians. While Vergil equates “the shadowy figure of Iulus,”²⁵ the Julian ancestor, and Ascanius, Aeneas’ son, not all accounts of the story concurred. Yet Dionysius’ account actually finds a way to even more closely connect the Julians and a religious model of Rome than Vergil’s does (and Vergil’s does indeed make a close connection). Dionysius makes Iulus the son of Ascanius, and upon the death of Ascanius, Iulus’ uncle Silvius “became king after the death of his brother, though . . . Iulus . . . claimed the succession to his father’s rule. . . Upon Iulus was conferred, instead of the sovereignty, a certain sacred authority and honor preferable to the royal dignity both for security and ease of life, and this prerogative was enjoyed even to my day by his posterity, who were

²³ Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome*, 20, wonders whether Julius Caesar may have used the myth of descent from Iulus during his election campaign for Pontifex Maximus in 63, but is certain that it had at least become popular during the first movement to make Octavian Pontifex Maximus in the thirties.

²⁴ Ibid., 18.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

called Julii after him. This house became the greatest and at the same time the most illustrious of any we know of.”²⁶ In Dionysius’ account, the Julian lineage is particularly connected to religious authority over the Roman people, with religious authority granted to the family at its beginning with the descent from Iulus and his special sacred authority; that this is the family that now dominated Roman society in the late first century was meant to indicate to contemporaries that this religious authority of the Julians is the most significant power to wield in Rome, that this religious authority hits on the very heart of Roman identity. Rather than identifying the ancestor of the ruling family as primarily a great warrior or a political leader, Dionysius sees Iulus as Rome’s religious leader.

While never actually quite as explicit as Dionysius, Vergil consistently paints a picture demonstrating the essentially sacral nature of Roman identity and the religious significance of the Julian ancestors.²⁷ As Michael Grant notes, “The myths of the *Aeneid* are devoted to religion as well as nationalism. Virgil calls Aeneas *pious*, which means dedicated to his family and his country, and in harmony with the will of Providence.”²⁸ Indeed, the entire poem is actually about *pietas* more than anything else. While the famous first line of the poem states that Vergil sings of arms and a man, his invocation of the muse asks, “Muse, relate to me the reasons, with him having been thwarted by the power of Juno, vexed at this, the queen of the gods drove this man marked by *pietas* to undergo so many misfortunes, to encounter so many labors.”²⁹ This is

²⁶ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, I.70.3-4.

²⁷ In adopting this position, we follow the methodology at least of Katharine Toll in her article “Making Roman-ness and the ‘*Aeneid*,’” *Classical Antiquity* 16, no. 1 (1997). Toll reacts against the traditional scholarly obsession over Augustus and Vergil, writing “Vergil’s ideas about the Romans, and about the traits or beliefs that composed Roman national character, were much more important to his poem than his ideas about Augustus. . . I here set Augustus firmly aside in favor of an inquiry into the *Aeneid*’s reflections on Roman-ness” (p. 34). Likewise, I also am less interested in the nuances of the relationship between Vergil and Augustus and more interested in what the *Aeneid* has to say about Roman identity, as I believe that Vergil wrote his epic as a way of expressing what it means to be truly Roman more than just to tell an epic historical story.

²⁸ Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, 298.

²⁹ Vergil, *Aeneid*, I.8-11.

the question Vergil seeks to answer, and he significantly immediately defines Aeneas by his *pietas*, his piety and dutiful-ness toward gods and men. As Anton Powell notes, “God and man alike express the idea that human *pietas* can reasonably be expected to draw from divinity protection and favour on earth.”³⁰ The question Vergil seeks to answer, then, is why Aeneas faced such difficulties despite his incredible *pietas*. Ovid notes in *Metamorphoses* that even the Greeks recognized Aeneas for his piety; he narrates Aeneas’ former enemy Macareus calling him “O you, most just of all the Trojans, goddess-born (for with the war having ended you are no longer called an enemy, Aeneas).”³¹

Pietas is the defining theme of the epic, recurring again and again in many different contexts. It is especially associated with Aeneas, who is constantly described as *pious*, beginning with his first appearance during Juno’s storm. Piety is especially connected to the Trojans by means of the juxtaposition of Vergil’s description of Greeks and Trojans in the aftermath of the Greek victory at Troy. As already noted, the defining image of Book II, the story of how the Greeks took the city, is Aeneas fleeing from the city carrying his father over his shoulder with the family gods. His highest priorities are the objects of *pietas*: family and gods. Vergil strikes a similar note to Ovid’s description of the event; Ovid writes in his *Metamorphoses*, “The sacred objects and, the other sacred thing, his father, such a venerable burden, the Cythereian hero carried on his shoulders: From so much wealth the pious Aeneas chooses these things and his son Ascanius.”³²

This picture of Aeneas is juxtaposed with very different images of noteworthy Greeks. Earlier in that very same book the reader confronts the brutal image of Pyrrhus slaughtering Priam’s son in front of his father before murdering and decapitating Priam in front of the altar.

³⁰ Anton Powell, *Virgil the Partisan* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2008), 33.

³¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIV.245-247.

³² *Ibid.*, XIII.624-627.

Before his death, Priam shouts at Pyrrhus, “But to you for your crime, for such deeds, may the gods - if there is justice in heaven - who look to such things deal out the thanks you deserve and give you what you are owed!”³³ We learn shortly afterwards in Book III that Pyrrhus’ crimes have indeed caught up to him, as he has been killed in turn by Orestes.

And Pyrrhus is not the only Greek noted in the *Aeneid* for impiety. Ajax the Lesser rushed into the temple of Minerva and seized Cassandra and took her away from the temple.³⁴ For this crime, Minerva killed Ajax en route back to Greece. We learn of this in the *Aeneid* from Juno herself, the enemy of Aeneas. She is envious that Minerva was able to utterly destroy Ajax for his impiety against her, even though Minerva sided with the Greeks during the Trojan War, while Juno is unable to similarly destroy the remnants of her Trojan enemies. In a bitter passage, she almost whines:

Am I beaten, not able to stop him from the beginning and turn away this king of the Teucrians from Italy? Surely I must be prevented by the Fates. Is not Minerva able to burn up an Argive ship and drown the masters themselves in the sea on account of the crime and madness of Ajax son of Oileus alone? She herself threw the swift fire of Jove out of the clouds and both scattered the ships and overturned the seas with winds; she snatched up that man, breathing flames with his chest pierced and impaled him on a sharp rock in a whirlpool. But I, who walk proudly as queen of the gods and sister and wife of Jove, I carry on wars with one race so many years. And can anyone honor the power of Juno hereafter, or will anyone place an offering on my altars as a suppliant?³⁵

The obvious observation the audience is supposed to make, of course, is that Ajax is guilty of personal impiety against the goddess, while Aeneas himself is blameless. And yet Juno is still able to delay, harass, and harm Aeneas’ men for ten years. Even when Aeneas faces his greatest temptation, staying with Dido at Carthage, Aeneas eventually realizes his error and returns to his

³³ Vergil, *Aeneid*, II.535-538.

³⁴ Ovid similarly mentions in *Metamorphoses* XIII.412-414 that the Trojan women clung to their statues of the gods, until the impious Greeks dragged them (the women and the images) away as plunder.

³⁵ Vergil, *Aeneid*, I.40-49.

men and his duty: “Aeneas, unlike Achilles, stays resolutely with his men. Solidarity with one’s community was part of the meaning of *pietas*.”³⁶ This gets back, of course, to the question of the poem: why is such a pious man facing such troubles?

Whenever Vergil is able to attribute any virtue to a Roman in the *Aeneid*, his first instinct is always to attribute *pietas* to them. He clearly sees this virtue as central to Roman identity. In Book VI, when Aeneas is taken to see the future of the Roman people, he is shown many of the great heroes of Roman history. While many of the characters are well-known and have attributes known to history, “the case of Marcellus has a special significance for Virgil’s own intentions.” Marcellus died while Vergil was still writing his poem, but was universally mourned as a great loss to the Roman people. As Marcellus was considered great yet had no predetermined characterization due to his early demise, Powell notes, “Virgil in counterfactual mode was free to project any quality he wished onto virtually a blank screen. . . . That *pietas* should be given primacy in Virgil’s list of the youth’s qualities is more interesting; for that quality had been far less prominent in Roman public ideology – before Virgil’s era.”³⁷ Given the entire range of virtues to project onto an admired Roman, Vergil chooses *pietas*, indicating that this virtue is central to the realization of the Roman ideal, to what it means to be a good Roman, to Roman identity itself.

The poet confirms this in Book XII, when Juno finally relents in her anger against the Trojans and Aeneas and his men triumph over Turnus and the Rutulians. In his conciliatory speech to his wife, Jupiter tells Juno that the name of the Trojans will not be passed down, but

³⁶ Powell, *Virgil the Partisan*, 39-40. Powell notes that Aeneas’ situation is also completely different from Odysseus’: Odysseus must leave the temptations of life with Circe to return to his beloved Penelope; Aeneas, on the other hand, is forced to leave the woman he loves, so that Aeneas’ motivation “extends far further toward his descendants and community than do the motives of the two Homeric heroes who in many ways served as Virgil’s models,” Achilles and Odysseus.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

that Aeneas' descendants, the Romans, will be called Latins, mixed with the blood of the Italians. "I will add custom and rites of sacred things and I will make them all Latins with one tongue," he tells her. "From Ausonian blood will this mixed race rise, and you will see them go beyond all men and gods with respect to piety, and no other race will observe your honors equally."³⁸ Although the Romans will in many respects be Italian, particularly in name and language, they will continue to be marked by piety – this moment is the ethnogenesis of the Roman people in Vergil's epic, and the moment is marked by acknowledgement of the unique, deep, and lasting relationship between the gods and the Romans, the most pious of all men.³⁹ Even to their enemy, Juno, the Romans will give unparalleled worship. In this moment of uniting Trojans and Latins, Vergil reconciles the differing origins of the various Roman *gentes*; while some Roman families had always claimed descent from Troy, many if not most did not, and it is perhaps for this reason that the Trojan myth held so little importance in the Republic. But in this ethnogenetic moment, Vergil includes both the Trojan families as well as the Italian families, uniting the different groups into the new label "Roman."⁴⁰ Vergil was very careful in Book VII, the muster of the Italian forces against the Trojans, to include ancestors of these Italian Roman *gentes*. For instance, he specifically cites Clausus, the ancestor of the Claudians, who claimed Sabine origin,

³⁸ Vergil, *Aeneid*, XII.838-841.

³⁹ An intriguing suggestion comes from Toll, "Making Roman-ness and the 'Aeneid,'" as she argues that Vergil himself might not have been born a Roman; he himself might have been only granted citizenship over the course of incorporation of the rest of Italy in the Late Republic, and so might himself have occupied a middle-ground, born Italian but considering himself Roman. In this way, he might have had both special insight into the interplay between these two sources of identity, but also a special interest in using his epic to mediate between the two.

⁴⁰ For an impressive study of the ways Vergil connects Aeneas, Troy, and the Trojans with Italy and the Italians, see Francis Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), particularly 111-123. An especially intriguing line of analysis Cairns follows is the way in which Vergil connects Aeneas to Italy while simultaneously disconnecting Turnus from Italy, even as he claims to fight on behalf of Italy against the foreign Trojan invaders. For instance, when Latinus meets Aeneas in Book VII, he immediately sees him as an Italian, and Amata reveals in a speech that Turnus is actually of Argive descent in VII.371f, thus naturalizing Aeneas while removing Turnus from Italy. The trend culminates in Book XII, where, Cairns notices, "of the similes in Book 12 referring to Aeneas and/or Turnus and involving a specific geographical reference, the two which concern Aeneas alone contain an Italian reference, and the three which concern Turnus alone contain a non-Italian reference; and there appear to be no counter-trends. The Homeric originals of these similes amply confirm that the geographical references chosen by Virgil are significant." (p. 111)

as being part of the war.⁴¹ By having these founders present at the battle, they are explicitly included in the creation of the Roman people, so that Vergil does not have to worry about how to explain why Romans have such varied roots.⁴² At the conclusion of this council, upon hearing these things, “Juno nodded to these things and, gladdened, she changed her mind.”⁴³

This moment of creating the Roman people as a people defined by their piety and connection to the gods changes everything; it abates Juno’s wrath and, I would argue, provides the answer to Vergil’s question from the very beginning of the poem as to why a pious man faces such trouble. Aeneas’ piety in the first eleven and a half books of the poem only brings reward from most of the gods; although Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, and others aid him, Juno has not consented to help him and stands in his way. With this moment of ethnogenesis, Juno will now also support Aeneas and his descendants in their piety, rather than opposing them. Vergil here shows why Romans of his day could connect *pietas* with *felicitas* in a way that Aeneas could not: until this moment of the formal creation of the Roman people, a people Jupiter defines by the sacral bonds between the community and all the gods, there was no necessary connection between piety and success. It is the sacral identity of the Roman people that connects the two, so the question only applies to Rome after this moment. In this way, Vergil is able to explain the hardships of such a pious man, including his peoples’ defeat at the hands of the Greeks during the Trojan War, while still asserting that piety will be rewarded with success in Roman history. Without this explanation, a descent from Troy would be complicated by connotations of weakness and defeat in spite of reverence to the gods. Vergil’s telling of the story presents a

⁴¹ Vergil, *Aeneid*, VII.706.

⁴² For an excellent article describing the great variety of legendary genealogies in ancient Rome, see T.P. Wiseman, “Legendary Genealogies in Late-Republican Rome,” *Greece & Rome* 21, no. 2 (1974). Wiseman goes through the varied roots of the great Roman families, including those descended from Aeneas, those claiming Trojan roots but not through Aeneas, as well as the various Italian ancestries.

⁴³ Vergil, *Aeneid*, XII.842-843.

single moment in history that changed everything, a moment where Trojans became Romans and shed their past failures while retaining their legendary piety, earning the favor of the gods and *becoming* the people chosen by the gods to rule the world as prophesied throughout the earlier sections of Vergil's epic.

That Vergil chooses Aeneas to be the subject of his poem on the roots of Rome rather than Romulus is surely significant. Modern scholar Katharine Toll argues that Vergil picked Aeneas precisely because even though Romulus had traditionally drawn more interest among Romans, he was too explicitly Roman and not Italian. Aeneas must "function as ancestor to an entity greater than Rome, an entity inclusive of Rome and indeed often focused upon it, but more extensive and congenerous. Vergil begins the project of getting Rome and the Italians to cohere by providing them with a common source."⁴⁴ Romulus, obviously, could not be made to fill that role. If this was indeed Vergil's purpose, then it is further evidence that the *Aeneid* is intended to speak to the meaning of Roman identity by resolving some of the contradictions and multiple meanings deriving from Rome's multiple roots.

3.3 *Founding Rome*

In the same way that Vergil examines the sacral bonds of *Romanitas* in its most ancient founder, Livy details the origins of Rome from the age of Romulus, the founder of the formal city of Rome. Livy's narrative of the early years of Roman history provides further examples of the sacral nature of Roman identity in the Augustan Age. While it is difficult to tell to what extent people literally believed in the stories of the Roman monarchy, an important insight to keep in mind, as always, is that for Augustan writers, "the stories of early Rome, which they told, retold and (sometimes no doubt) invented, were 'true' in quite a different way or, better, were

⁴⁴ Toll, "Making Roman-ness and the '*Aeneid*,'" 42.

doing a different kind of job: they were using the theme of the city's origins as a way of discussing Roman culture and religion much more generally, of defining and classifying it, of debating its problems and peculiarities."⁴⁵

Livy's treatment of Romulus, Rome's political founder and first king, opens his account of Roman sacrality. As he narrates the birth of Romulus and Remus, Livy writes, "But the origin of such a great city was bound, as I suppose, by the Fates, along with the beginning of the mightiest of empires, second only to the power of the gods," and the twins, after being exposed at the orders of their uncle, are Fatefully rescued at the future site of the city of Rome.⁴⁶ Seeing this location as divinely blessed, due to their rescue as infants as well as the ancient association with Hercules,⁴⁷ the twins later conduct their famous augury, resulting in Remus' murder. While this act might be seen as impious and reflect poorly on Rome's founder, Livy intervenes so that we see Romulus positively, not as a tyrant merely reestablishing the very corrupt order he and his brother had so recently overthrown. Before the murder, we see Romulus piously celebrating the Lupercalia along with his brother, and immediately afterwards he is presented sacrificing to the gods. Not only is the Remus story sandwiched between acts of piety by Romulus, but the story of the murder itself receives scant attention; it receives all of two sentences in Livy's narrative. After the disputed augury, Livy writes, "Thereupon began an altercation, the struggle of their angers turned toward slaughter; here in the tumult Remus fell by a blow. The more common story is that in derision of his brother Remus leaped over the new walls; thereupon in anger Romulus killed him, and with these words also cast this reproach, 'Thus then perish

⁴⁵ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 4.

⁴⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.4.1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., I.6.3; see also Vergil, *Aeneid*, Book VII, in which Evander tells Aeneas a similar story of Hercules' exploits on the site in olden times.

whoever else jumps over my walls!’”⁴⁸ Remus’ death is covered in short, declarative bursts and can be missed if the reader loses concentration for just a moment. Livy then presents an alternative story of the murder that even implies that Remus’ death was his own fault! It is clearly important to Livy to clear Romulus of any impiety; the story of Remus was too well-known to write out completely, but Livy finds ways to work around it.⁴⁹

Romulus’ first acts as king also serve to demonstrate the importance of religion to Roman identity. Livy narrates, “With the divine rites having been performed, and the multitude having been called to council, Romulus gave the laws, as nothing else could bring the people together as one body politic.”⁵⁰ It is significant that religious actions precede legal and political ones. As noted before, during the Republican period, Roman identity was heavily based upon Rome’s political institutions and traditions. Here, however, Livy turns that conception on its head. Roman law and politics come early, but only *after* religious concerns have been dealt with, after Romulus has conducted all the proper rites. Livy acknowledges the importance of law and custom in unifying the Roman people, but he gives priority to the gods: these things are important, but only once the primary religious functions are finished. When Romulus sends an embassy to the Latins, the Romans “boast of divine aid for their foundation . . . Rome was just another new city, in no way the first, but simply more favoured by fate. . . Livy implies a much greater sense of inexorable growth by making the neighbors truly fearful (even for their descendants) rather than just dismissive, lending a further sense of the future of Rome; they take the idea of divine destiny very seriously.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid., I.7.2.

⁴⁹ Gary B. Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 156-9. For more on the story of Remus, see T.P. Wiseman, *Remus: A Roman Myth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.8.1.

⁵¹ Matthew Fox, *Roman Historical Myths* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), 107.

While Romulus of course occupies an important place in Livy's narrative, it is interesting to note that his role is actually less important for Livy than for other writers. As Miles notes, other historians actually attribute more of Rome's important institutions to Romulus than do Livy, writing, "He is not the unambiguously divine and authoritative figure that we find, for example, in the narrative of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. He is one among several founders and is himself chiefly identified with only one aspect of the city's complete foundation."⁵² This one aspect is, of course, the founding of Rome's political institutions and laws. Livy uses the term *conditor*, founder, not only for Romulus, but for several important Roman figures, notably Numa Pompilius, associated with Roman religion; Servius Tullius, who divided Romans into their traditional orders; Brutus, who founded the Republic; and Appius Claudius, who ratified the Law of the XII Tables.

This principle of having multiple founders accomplishes several tasks. First, it marks a focus on change and development that counters the traditional notion of the *mos maiorum*. While these traditional ways are cited constantly during the Republic, it is remarkable how little use Livy makes of the *mos maiorum*. As Miles notes, in Livy's account, the *mos maiorum* appear only rarely and in special circumstances: Livy uses the word *maiores* only 13 times in the first five books of his history, and not once does he use the word in his editorial voice as author, but only when recounting speeches of the political figures he is documenting. Miles suggests that Livy does this to associate appeals to the *maiorum* with the partisan politics of the late Republic that led to civil war.⁵³ Contrary to Republican authors who celebrate traditionalism, "Livy presents an approach to Roman history that explicitly acknowledges the value of change

⁵² Miles, *Livy*, 221.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 111-113.

and that denies to the *maiores* and their institutions a universal and timeless value.”⁵⁴ Livy’s focus on multiple foundations provides him a way to refute an older notion of Roman identity before going on to assert his own model.

In addition to tearing down the model of the *mos maiorum*, Livy’s use of the concept of multiple founders of Rome draws added attention to the institutions that are connected with these newly recognized founders. This is especially significant in that the first of the new founders is immediately juxtaposed with Romulus, as he is Romulus’ successor, Numa Pompilius. As Grant notes, “Numa is a classic Prince of Peace, as familiar a folk-lore figure as his predecessor Romulus the Prince of War.”⁵⁵ Yet, actually, Livy presents him as more than that: he is a second founder of Rome, and the source of Rome’s religious institutions, on the same level as Romulus the political founder. Numa is introduced as an exceptionally pious man, and sets about to building temples and appointing the highest priests of Roman religion. Livy presents Numa as an unqualified success, as the Romans fully put on this religious vision of themselves. The fear of the gods had resulted in care from the gods, protection over the Roman people, and “had filled the hearts of them all with piety, so that it was good faith and the keeping of oaths rather than the rule of law and the fear of penalties that guided the citizenry.”⁵⁶ Livy makes it clear that Numa instilled in the Roman people a sense that their ultimate source of strength and greatness was their piety, their connection to the gods, and it was the fact that they were the most pious of all men that had marked them for greatness and blessings from the gods. Not only did the Romans themselves adopt this religious view of themselves, but their rivals are also portrayed as seeing the Romans in this light. Livy again writes, “And while these men fashioned themselves and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 119. Miles argues that Livy associates the *mos maiorum* with the past, and particularly with a negative period in Roman history. He attributes dynamism and multiple foundations to periods of legendary success, implicitly arguing that it is only by escaping the cycle of the *mos maiorum* that Rome can be great again.

⁵⁵ Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, 320.

⁵⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.21.1

their character in relation to their king, Numa, as their sole example, the neighboring peoples also, who before had believed a fort, not a city, had been placed in their midst to the disruption of the peace of them all, were led to a respect for them, so that they considered it sacrilegious to injure a people entirely devoted to the worship of the gods.”⁵⁷ Not only does Numa’s vision of a sacral people build on Romulus’ political foundation, but in many ways it is presented as *replacing* the political vision. Just as Augustan writers were replacing a civic vision of Rome with a sacral one, so had Rome’s second king replaced Romulus’ political settlement with his own religious one. Fox also recognizes the role Livy gives to Numa, as “Livy’s picture of Numa is a great deal more monolithic than that of Romulus; as a result he is much more credible as an antecedent, on account of the steadfastness of his virtue. He shares with Romulus the superiority among his people, but his is much greater.”⁵⁸ He concludes that “Romulus’ aim was to keep his rule secure; Numa’s, more complex and enlightened, was to help his people remain strong through their communal faith.”⁵⁹ The recognition of multiple founders of Rome enables Livy to make this rhetorical move that draws attention to his alternative vision of *Romanitas*.

This move to equate Numa’s and Romulus’ respective foundations is not unique to Livy’s work. In a hymn to Augustus, Horace equates their efforts, along with the deeds of a few other great Romans, in a way that Republican Romans never would have. As discussed earlier, Romulus was the ultimate figure for Rome in the Republic, with no one on par with his accomplishments. Yet Horace, when seeking to sing a song of the greatest deeds, does not see Romulus as such a clear choice. He writes, “After these I do not know whether I should first remember Romulus, or the peaceful reign of Pompilius, or of the proud arms of Tarquinius, or of

⁵⁷ Ibid. I.21.2

⁵⁸ Fox, *Roman Historical Myths*, 113.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 114.

the death of noble Cato.”⁶⁰ Horace, like Livy, puts Numa’s pious reign on the same level as the legendary Romulus.

The concept of multiple foundations has especial resonance for Roman religious identity due to the nature of the foundations Livy chooses. As Miles notes, “Livy’s concept of foundation identifies only a very few, well-defined institutions as essential to Roman identity. Since they do not constitute a list of what can be changed but rather a very restricted list of what cannot be changed, they leave a wide scope for innovation.”⁶¹ Looking at what the specific foundations are, however, gives an idea of the emphasis Livy draws to Numa’s foundation. Romulus’ foundation concerns the site of Rome and the establishment of Roman political and legal institutions. Servius’ foundation is the stratification of society, further impacting Roman politics. Brutus’ foundation is the overthrow of the political structure established by Romulus and its replacement by the Republic. Appius Claudius’ foundation is a formal codification of Rome’s legal institutions, again echoing Romulus’ work. Each of the other major foundations is concerned with changes and adjustments to Rome’s political institutions. Yet Numa’s religious foundation is once and for all – there is no follow up, no second religious founder who adds to or further specifies Numa’s foundation. The implication is that, yes, the political structures are important to Roman identity, but they do change at least in slight ways over time. The more lasting source of Roman identity, the foundation that even Rome’s greatest leaders have not seen fit to change, is the religious foundation establishing Rome as a sacral people marked by piety.

⁶⁰ Horace, *Odes*, I.xii.33-36.

⁶¹ Miles, *Livy*, 131.

4 Telling Republican History

Roman writers did not limit their description of the sacral nature of Roman identity to stories of Rome's founding and early years. Their narration of the history of the Roman Republic served to contribute to the sense of a shared history for this sacral community. This history was marked by heavy focus on the importance of their shared religion to the Roman community, as it led to their successes and explained their periods of trouble and crisis. Three major themes Augustan writers, particularly Livy, emphasize in their discussions of religion are war, crisis, and boundaries. These themes will be analyzed by looking at specific moments in Republican history and examining the way that Livy narrates them, how they ought to be interpreted, and their connection to religious identity.

This study of specific moments is useful when reading Augustan writers because this is the way that they wrote their works. Rather than needing to do deep textual analysis of entire books of Livy (which certainly can be done, and often valuably, as in analyses of Book V mentioned below), we can isolate major moments, as Livy designed his history to be built around specific incidents which would serve as *exempla*, historical and moral examples for contemporary audiences. Like George Santayana's claim that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," Livy's work is built around an assumption "that a correct understanding of the past permits an enlightened course of action that will produce the most desirable result in the future."¹ Both Livy and Augustus himself were interested in the use of *exempla*, whether by Livy's offering interpretations of Roman history in *Ab Urbe Condita* or by Augustus' constructing statues of his own ancestors among the great men of Roman history.² These *exempla* are more important for analyzing Augustan writing than Republican writing

¹ Jane Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 198.

² *Ibid.*, 195-196, 177.

because, as Chaplin notes, while most Republican writers are willing to reinterpret “his *exempla* to fit the context, the early imperial authors regard each *exemplum*’s meaning as fixed.”³ As noted earlier in the second chapter, for instance, Cicero is willing to reinterpret historical stories and myths such as the Trojan horse depending on the speech he is giving, so that in one speech he presents himself as inside the horse and at other times as inside the city and his enemies as inside the horse. Augustan writers tend to attribute a single meaning to each story as seen by the consistent interpretations of events in each writer and also in accounts by different writers, so that these stories are more likely to offer a strong meaning for Roman audiences. When the meaning is fluid, the story is useful in context, but there is little deep instruction in terms of defining who the Romans are; when the meaning is fixed, it offers a consistent and recurring tale of Roman identity. And the incidents that are most important in the histories are precisely those that offer the most value for understanding Roman identity in the Augustan Age; as Chaplin notes, “It is a question not of trying to erase all traces of dangerous precedents, but rather of deciding which aspects to emphasize.”⁴ In Livy’s time, the Romans had over 700 years of history to cull from; the specific stories Livy chooses to tell in the most detail are those that he sees as most important for transmitting the moral message he wishes to convey.⁵

4.1 Religion and Warfare

In Augustan literature, there is an especially strong connection drawn between religion and the spread of Roman imperial rule. One of the most important rituals discussed by writers is

³ Ibid., 170.

⁴ Ibid., 183.

⁵ For further discussion of this idea, see Peter J. Holliday, “Time, History and Ritual on the Ara Pacis Augustae,” *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 4 (1990): 542ff. Holliday argues herein that “Romans sought to make all events fit into a comprehensive, cosmic pattern of history. . . History imposes order.” Thus, Livy’s history of Rome would be designed with two purposes – firstly, to narrate Roman history, but more importantly, to give order and meaning to that history. Livy is no mere chronicler, but is rather especially concerned with the meaning of events.

that of *evocatio*, the calling-forth of the gods of the enemy to Rome. The clearest example of the ritual comes in the narration of the siege of Veii in 396, particularly as told by Livy. Before the decisive attack on the city, Camillus prays, “Pythian Apollo, with your leadership and impelled by your power I will proceed to destroy the city of Veii, and to you the tenth part of the spoils I devote. Likewise to you, Juno Regina, who now honors Veii, I entreat you that we, victorious, shall accompany you to be in our city, where you will receive a temple worthy of your greatness.”⁶ In addition to making promises to gods already worshipped at Rome, Camillus promises the tutelary deity of the city of Veii the worship of the Romans if she will just leave the service of the Veientines and come to Rome. Implicit is the idea that the worship of the Romans is more desirable than the worship of Veii, or else the promise of Roman worship would be of no value to Juno.

The story of Veii is not the only example of *evocatio*, even if it is the most famous and clear. According to Augustan writers, *evocatio* was a common procedure. Verrius Flaccus, an Augustan writer, is cited by Pliny the Elder as writing in one of his lost works that “in sieges, before anything else is done it is customary with the Roman priests to summon out the god, under whose protection that city is, and promise them the same, and even greater, worship from the Romans. And this practice remains part of the discipline in our holy priesthood even now.”⁷ Although Pliny is writing in a later period, the nature of the citation indicates that he is presenting a genuinely Augustan viewpoint. Robert Palmer argues that *evocatio* was a common ritual specifically with the different Junos of Italian cities, as Juno was a common tutelary deity for Italian cities. He argues that Juno Caprotina was also removed to Rome from Fidenae in 426

⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.21.1.

⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 28.4.18.

by *evocatio*, for instance.⁸ Michael Lipka argues that *evocatio*s were also performed to bring Vertumnus from Vosinii, Minerva from Falerii Veteres, and even Juno Caelestis from Carthage during the Third Punic War, summoned forth by Scipio Aemilianus.⁹ “In these specific cases (with the exception perhaps of the Carthaginian Juno), the deity called forth was granted a new temple in Rome. It was thus fully adopted into the official Roman pantheon.”¹⁰ Scholars have even found direct evidence for *evocatio* during the late Republican period, with an inscribed stone “from a temple dedicated by the Roman general to the patron deity of Isaura Vetus, who had been ‘called out’ of the town in the traditional way [in 75].”¹¹

Scholars attempting to interpret the concept of *evocatio* have tended to focus on determining the historical validity of the evocation events and possible changes in the actual ritual. As mentioned before, Palmer accepts the historical truth of all the documented evocations as part of his theory that the ritual was connected to the theological role of Juno in Italian religions. Lipka similarly accepts the stories of the ritual as indicative of true Roman Republican practice, although without the explicit theorization of Palmer. Rupke sees the ritual as an accurate description of Republican practice, but no longer being practiced during the late Republic and Principate, a ritual “still remembered but no longer performed.”¹² Beard, North, and Price, however, present a different view on the subject. As all of the documented cases of *evocatio* with cult transference to Rome occur in the Republican period, they wonder what happened to the ritual during the late Republic and Principate. By adding the Isaura Vetus inscription to their discussion of *evocatio*, however, they theorize that the ritual did indeed

⁸ Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum*, 39, 76.

⁹ Michael Lipka, *Roman Gods: A Conceptual Approach* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 126. The source for the evocation of Juno Caelestis, or Tanit, is in the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, a fourth century writer. See also Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 97-98 for *evocatio* at Veii and Carthage.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 133-4.

¹² Rupke, *Religion of the Romans*, 133.

survive, but evolved: “On this occasion the temple offered to the deity was not in Rome itself, but on provincial territory. . . not that it [the ritual of *evocatio*] entirely died out, but that the location of the promised temple changed.”¹³ The basic assumption remains the same, though – that Augustan (and later) writers describing Republican instances of *evocatio* are accurately describing a Republican ritual.

Gabriella Gustafsson, on the other hand, presents an entirely different idea of *evocatio*. By stepping back and seriously questioning all the sources we have concerning the concept, she casts serious doubts on the historicity of any specific *evocatio* ritual used by Republican Romans. For instance, she notes that “there are no indisputably *ritual* elements in any of the texts,” and the texts that make the greatest claims for a ritual are the texts most separated from the actual events by time.¹⁴ She does see the Isaura Vetus inscription as giving evidence for the existence of the concept of *evocatio* at least during the late Republic and Augustan period, even if we cannot be certain of the specifics. Troubled by the lack of genuine evidence for Republican evocations, however, she wonders that “it is quite conceivable that Livy projected back into the remote past a ritual that he in fact only knew about from *recent* history, thereby both giving the conquest of Veii an air of ritualistic ‘correctness’ and, at the same time, giving the temple of Juno Regina a historiographically meaningful etiology.”¹⁵ If the only concrete evidence for *evocatio* dates from the late Republic, then it is at least a plausible possibility that Livy and other writers were working analogically in their descriptions of Veii and other instances of *evocatio*, attributing a modern ritual to older times.

¹³ Beard, North, and Price, *Religion of the Romans Vol. 1*, 133-134.

¹⁴ Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum*, 52. Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* and Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* are the sources that present a specific historical ritual of *evocatio*, yet both these sources date from the late 4th century AD, making them far less reliable for understanding the Republic than texts closer to the time period itself.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-2.

Yet regardless of the historicity of the *evocatio* rituals, a central argument here is that *evocatio* is important and must be considered because the Augustan writers give it significance in their narratives. This importance remains no matter whether we find out that the ritual does indeed date back to the Middle Republican time period or was a late Republican invention. Gustafsson emphasizes that *evocatio* has been connected to some of the most important conquests in Republican history: Veii, the conquest of a neighboring rival by one of Rome's greatest heroes; and Carthage, the destruction of Rome's greatest enemy and Mediterranean rival. Thus, "Veii and Carthage are not only decisive milestones in Roman history: because of this, they also have a very heavy symbolic position in Roman historiography."¹⁶

What, then, is the reason for the emphasis put on this ritual, attributing it to key moments? The focus on *evocatio* explains Roman military and imperial success as due to a superior relationship with the gods. It is significant that in Livy's account of the evocation of Juno Regina from Veii, he is careful to note the consent of the goddess in her own evocation. In the narrative, Camillus selects a group of men to carry Juno's statue to Rome. "Then a certain one of them, either by divine spiritual influence or as a childish joke, asked, 'Do you wish to come to Rome, Juno?' The others then shouted out that the goddess had nodded her assent."¹⁷ Livy confidently reports, without even one of his famous qualifications of events he is skeptical about, the consent of the goddess to her removal to Rome. Thus, *evocatio* "helped to explain the centrality of Rome in the sacred topography of its empire, and it did so by placing the gods in Rome, in accordance with their express desire."¹⁸ That the gods are willing in so many cases in Livy's account to leave their homes and go to Rome indicates that there is something especially desirable about Roman worship and cult sites in Rome. After all, as Fay Glinister notes, "In fact,

¹⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁷ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.22.2.

¹⁸ Ando, *The Matter of the Gods*, 114.

it seems, it was not easy to uproot gods from their appropriate setting – in the cults and rites of Italy, sense of *place* is strong.”¹⁹ Gods in the Roman world did not always consent to being moved, as evidenced by Camillus’ description of how Juventas and Terminus refused to be moved during exaugural rites on the Capitoline Hill,²⁰ while Ando points out that the Penates chose to stay in Lavinium even though the Romans took over their worship and rites, requiring Roman pontiffs to travel there each year to perform the necessary rituals.²¹

The Romans, then, are clearly a special people, and Rome is the “centre, chosen by the gods.”²² There is something special about Roman worship, about being connected with the Roman people, that makes the gods prefer gaining close association with Rome to loyalty to their native locale. One must not forget that “all in all, it was a betrayal” when the gods abandoned their city to side with the Romans.²³ The stories of *evocatio*, then “connect with fundamental theological conceptions, which are in turn related to notions about a specific national character and duties of the Roman people.”²⁴ And this notion is that of the Augustan age, Livy’s concern to present Romans as a sacral people, a uniquely pious people connected to a special place.²⁵

4.2 Religion and Crisis

Augustan writers did not only focus on the connections between the Roman community and the gods during discussions of the spread of Roman imperial rule. A powerful, recurring

¹⁹ Fay Glinister, “Sacred Rubbish,” in Bispham and Smith, *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, 62.

²⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.54.

²¹ Ando, *The Matter of the Gods*, 113. See also p. 143, where Ando notes that the overarching theme of Book V of *AUC* “is the need to respect the location of the gods, their desire to reside in particular locales, and the need to bring worship to them there.”

²² Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum*, 120.

²³ Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 98.

²⁴ Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum*, 15.

²⁵ See the speeches of Camillus in Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.30 and V.51-54, where he outlines why the Romans must stay on their current site and not move the city to Veii. He particularly sees place as important, noting the fact that the gods that have chosen to come to Rome chose specifically not only to come with the Romans, but also to the site of Rome – the two are deeply connected. In fact, Camillus and the senators say they would rather that he had never captured Veii than that they move from the site and desert their land.

theme of Livy's narrative of Republican history is the onset and overcoming of crises. More specifically, Livy presents the idea that it is religious commitment, and re-commitment, that has enabled the Roman people to overcome so many crises throughout their history. Rather than being destroyed by crisis, the Romans are able to meet the needs of the moment by their connection with the gods and re-emerge more bonded and powerful than before. A few examples of these crises and Livy's narration of how Romans' sacral identity saved them will be presented here.

One of the early crises that Livy narrates occurs in 460, when Appius Herdonius captured the Capitoline Hill with a group of conspirators and called for a slave revolt. The Senate was frozen and confused, completely unsure of what to do and how to respond, not sure who might be friend and who might be foe. The Senate feared that there may be an enemy army of Etruscans, Sabines, Volscians, or Aequi coming. Yet no army was raised, as the tribunes of the plebs failed to see the danger and "such a great madness held the tribunes that they maintained that it was not war, but an empty appearance of war that had come to the Capitol to divert the minds of the people from consideration of the law."²⁶ The law in question is the *Lex Terentilia*, a proposed law that would limit the power of the consuls; the tribunes failed to see the danger to the Roman state, and thought the crisis was one manufactured by the consuls to preserve their power and distract the plebeians from their populist crusade against patrician power. The plebeians wished to do nothing, and the patricians did not know what to do; the state, Livy writes, was in danger of collapse. Each side accused the other of playing politics during the moment of crisis. Yet, as Miles notes, "Here, where not even the fear of common enemies both inside and beyond the city's walls can move disaffected Romans to defend their city, it is religious scruple,

²⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, III.16.

finally, that saves the day.”²⁷ Publius Valerius Publicola, one of the new consuls, rushed out of the Senate and made an impassioned plea to the people to save their state. Seeing that the danger itself makes no impact, he resorted to religious appeals:

If you feel no concern for your city, Quirites, yet you should revere your gods, captured by the enemy. Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Juno Regina, and Minerva, along with other gods and goddesses, are being besieged; a camp of slaves holds the national *Penates*! . . . Is it not proper and fitting for the fathers of the people, the consuls, the tribunes, gods and men, for all to bring their might in arms, to run to the Capitol, to free that place and bring peace to that most august home of Jupiter Optimus Maximus?²⁸

It is only by making a religious appeal that the consul can make known the seriousness of the crisis to the people and demonstrate to them the need to unite as Romans, “not a contest between patricians and plebeians.”²⁹ His speech roused the Romans, and they combined with a force of allies from Tusculum to retake the Capitol the next day, although the consul himself was killed in the battle. It is quite tempting to see in Livy’s presentation of this story a comment on recent Roman history. Partisan politics, the class conflict between patrician and plebeian, nearly destroyed the state, while renewed concern in religion saved Rome. Similarly, Livy might be saying, partisan politics, the often-class-based conflict between *optimates* and *populares*, nearly destroyed Rome, while religious revival has saved it. For more on this see the next chapter’s discussion of the Augustan revival.

The saga of the Gauls’ capture of Rome in 390 is full of further references to the importance of religion to Roman identity. The first hint comes before the invasion, when “Marcus Caedicius of the plebeians announced to the tribunes that while he himself was in the Via Nova, where there is now a chapel above the temple of Vesta, he had heard a voice in the

²⁷ Miles, *Livy*, 127.

²⁸ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, III.17.

²⁹ Ibid. For the full story of Appius Herdonius, see Livy III.15-18.

silence of the night more clear than a human voice, commanding that the magistrates be told that the Gauls were coming.”³⁰ The Romans, however, ignored this message – it was at their own peril that they did so, however, as the Gauls ended up defeating the Romans in a massacre at the Battle of the Allia and captured the city. Roman defeat, the lowest point in Roman history – lower even than Hannibal’s victories, as he never actually entered Rome – is prefaced by ignoring the warnings of the gods. It is by ignoring the relationship with the gods that the Romans are endangered. After the disaster, the Romans, it seems, remembered who they were, and worked to restore the relationship damaged by their lack of attention to divine warnings. While all the Romans who had not fled the city were left besieged upon the Capitoline Hill, the day came for an annual sacrifice held by the Fabii on the Quirinal. Caius Fabius Dursuo “descended from the Capitol, passed through the middle of the enemy stations, disturbed by neither a voice nor fear, and arrived at the Quirinal Hill. There, when all the customary rites had been performed, he returned by the same route with the same steadfast expression and pace, hoping the gods to be gracious and satisfied with their worship, since not even fear of death had led him to neglect them.”³¹ After this, the gods showed their favor again to the Romans by protecting them on the Capitoline Hill when the Gauls discovered a path up the cliff. They were almost to the top of the hill, having evaded detection by the sentries and even their dogs, “but they did not deceive the geese, those sacred to Juno, whom the Romans had abstained from eating even in their greatest hunger.”³² Receiving the warning, the Romans rushed out and repelled the assault, thanks to the warning of the gods that came because they respected the sanctity of the goddess’ property. After Camillus, an exceptionally pious man, freed Rome from the Gallic threat, “the very first measures he introduced into the Senate were those relating to the

³⁰ Ibid., V.32.

³¹ Ibid., V.46.

³² Ibid., V.47.

immortal gods.”³³ After restoring and purifying the existing temples that were despoiled by the enemy, Camillus ensured that the Romans made up for their error from before the disaster by building a temple to Aius Loquens, the disembodied voice that had warned Marcus Caedicius about the Gauls. In his speech at the end of Book V, Camillus recommitted the Romans to the gods and their national religion. Restoration of religion is fundamentally connected to the restoration of Rome – there can be no one without the other.

Yet Rome had not faced its last crisis on the battlefield. Two consuls, father and son, both named Publius Decius Mus, faced annihilation with their armies on the battlefield at different points in Rome’s early history. The elder Decius battled the Latins near Mount Vesuvius in 340. With his army in grave danger, Decius called upon the Pontifex Maximus to help him to give his life for the legions by performing a ritual called *devotio*. Decius devoted himself, along with the enemy army, to the gods of the underworld and then rushed alone into the enemy army. “Seen from both sides of the battlefield, he seemed huge and more majestic than a mere man, as though sent from heaven as a sacrifice to expiate all the anger of the gods and take destruction away from them and bring it to their enemies.”³⁴ He brought dread to the enemy, who ran away until finally shooting him from a distance. After his death, however, the Roman army, “freed from religious concerns, then just as if the first signal had been given arose and began a renewed fight,” winning in a route.³⁵ After the battle, the army gave credit to both the surviving consul who led the victory as well as the slain Decius, who “had turned onto himself alone all the threats and perils from the gods, both those above and those below.”³⁶

³³ Ibid., V.50.

³⁴ Ibid., VIII.9.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., VIII.10.

The second Decius faced a similar situation in 295 in a battle near Sentinum in the Third Samnite War. Decius' army faced destruction after being surrounded by enemy cavalry and chariots, and was fleeing in retreat. Decius cried, "Why do I delay any longer the fate of my family? This is given to our house, that we give ourselves as expiatory sacrifices to avert dangers from the state. Now I devote myself with the legions of the enemy to Tellus and to the infernal gods of the dead."³⁷ Like his father, Decius performed the *devotio* and charged into the thickest part of the enemy lines and was killed. Once again, the death of the general leads to victory, as the Pontifex Maximus, Livius, "shouted in turn that the death of the consul had discharged the Romans from their debt; the Samnites and Gauls had been given over to Tellus the Mother and the infernal gods of the dead."³⁸ While several scholars have questioned the meaning of the *devotio* ritual, whether it might have worked by contaminating the enemy by their killing the holy consul or by making the consul unholy and sending him among the enemy,³⁹ I believe it is clear that this ritual is an example of the scapegoat advocated by Rene Girard. As noted above, Livy describes the first Decius as appeasing the anger of the gods and bringing on himself all the dangers of the gods. Yet he himself is not unholy; he is an arbitrary victim who chooses to take the blame and restore the relationship between the Romans and the gods. That the battles are going poorly is evidence that the relationship has gone wrong, and the deaths of the Decii satisfy the bloodlust of the gods, ending their feud and restoring a right relationship with the Roman people.⁴⁰ Once again, Roman victory is predicated on their relationship with the gods, not on military strength or stratagems.

³⁷ Ibid., X.28.

³⁸ Ibid., X.29.

³⁹ See, for instance, Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 97. Turcan proposes that the consul devotes himself to the infernal gods, making himself unholy, perhaps even *nefas*, and contaminates the enemy by running into their midst.

⁴⁰ For the scapegoat principle, see Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). This is a very simple description of the concept, and Girard's work is the most comprehensive, compelling case and fits the circumstances of the *devotios* very well.

Of course, any description of Rome's crises is incomplete without a discussion of the Hannibalic War, the greatest prolonged threat to the Republic. During his discussion of the Second Punic War, Livy provides both negative and positive examples, as with the invasion of the Gauls in 390, to demonstrate that both Roman failures and successes are directly attributable to Roman attitudes towards religion. During the course of the war, Livy provides some of the most spectacular lists of prodigies and omens in his history, implicitly stating that there is something gone wrong between the Romans and the gods that has caused this disaster, and it must be made right.⁴¹

An early example from this war comes after the disaster at Lake Trasimene led by Caius Flaminius. After the battle, Quintus Fabius Maximus (Fabius Cunctator, "the Delayer") was once again appointed dictator and tasked with saving Rome. As Livy narrates, "On the day he entered office, with the Senate having been summoned and beginning with regards to the gods, when he had fully informed the fathers that the fault from the consul C. Flaminius was more from negligence of the sacred ceremonies than from excessive rashness and ignorance, he insisted that they must consult the gods themselves in order to expiate the anger of those same gods."⁴² Flaminius, in his haste to enter battle with Hannibal, had left Rome before performing the traditional consular rites, and Fabius blames the disaster on this failure. The Romans had neglected their relationship with the gods once again, forgotten who they were, as when they ignored the warnings of Marcus Caedicius in 390. Thus Fabius, who saves the Republic, made his first task the restoration of the right relationship with the gods, going so far as to vow a Sacred Spring, a procedure where the Romans "give as a votive offering whatever the spring raised up from the swine and from the sheep and from the goats and from the oxen and from the

⁴¹ See, for instance, Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, XXI.46, XXII.1, XXII.36, XXII.57, and XXIII.36, just for omens from the early years of the invasion (218-215).

⁴² *Ibid.*, XXII.9.

herds - whatever had not been made sacred would be given to Jove, from whatever day the Senate and the people ordered it.”⁴³ The most important thing for Romans is their relationship with the gods, so the Romans must do whatever it takes, even if it means sacrificing an entire season’s worth of animals.

Unfortunately, in Livy’s narrative, not all Romans had yet learned the lesson of the importance of restoring the relationship with the gods. In the consular elections of 216, Varro is presented as making political appeals against Fabius, even accusing the Senate and the augurs of bringing the war on Italy. Varro’s campaign strategy is described in such a way as to recall the partisan nature of politics in the late Republic, with its division of *populares* against *optimates*. Varro “had ingratiated himself with the plebs by his attacks upon the leading men in the state and by all the tricks known to the demagogue.”⁴⁴ This description would, as with the narrative of Appius Herdonius described earlier, remind the reader of the chaotic years of the late Republic, a period characterized by decline in public religion (see the next chapter for discussion of Augustan ideas of decline), and thus associate Varro with a lack of piety. It is no accident, then, that Varro led the disaster at Cannae against the advice of his fellow-consul, the more cautious Aemilius Paullus, who had received advice from Fabius. Scholars have questioned the historicity of Livy’s description of the two consuls at Cannae, wondering whether Varro might actually not be as responsible for the catastrophe as depicted, as other mentions of him in Livy’s work are more positive. Moreover, Livy’s description of Cannae is clearly dependent on Polybius’ narrative of the same event – the two are remarkably similar – and Polybius’ patron was the grandson of Aemilius Paullus, Scipio Aemilianus, giving him reason to exonerate his patron’s ancestor and place the blame on his fellow-consul. Yet regardless of what actually

⁴³ Ibid., XXII.10.

⁴⁴ Ibid., XXII.34.

happened in 216, what is critical is to realize the importance that Livy places on the religious failings of the ill-fated general. Since Varro is presented as losing the battle, he is also introduced as overly political and lacking in the religious piety that characterizes the hero of the period, Fabius.

After Cannae, it seems that the Romans realized their errors and recommitted themselves to their religion, turning to Fabius for guidance. No more did the Romans question Fabius' strategy or his focus on fulfilling religious obligations. When Rome's other generals were occupied with harassing Hannibal and defending Roman cities such as Capua, Fabius placed highest priority on his religious duties, "being occupied at first with the collection of the auspices, and then with the prodigies which were being announced one after another; which the *haruspices* were saying would not at all be easy to be expiated."⁴⁵ Yet no one attacked Fabius now for his obsession with expiating the omens; in Livy's account it seems that the Romans now fully understood the necessity of his actions, that they must take priority even over leading the army out into Italy. An unspecified amount of time later, Fabius at last managed to expiate the prodigies, crossed the Volturnus and marched with his army to besiege the Campanian cities that had revolted to Hannibal.⁴⁶

Rome's ultimate victory over Hannibal was also credited to religious practice. It is, of course, noteworthy that Scipio is always described as possessing a strong connection to Jupiter, spending hours each day sitting in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline. In this way, he is quickly established as a pious Roman, connected with the Roman religious order rather than the political divisions associated with Varro and others. But there are other, perhaps even more interesting associations. Before Scipio's invasion of Africa, an omen of a shower of stones led to

⁴⁵ Ibid., XXIII.36.

⁴⁶ Ibid., XXIII.39.

a consultation of the Sibylline Books. “In a verse it said that whenever a foreign enemy had made war on Italian soil, Italy would be able to dislodge him and conquer him if the Idaean mother [Magna Mater] were conveyed from Pessinus to Rome.”⁴⁷ The sacred black stone, the *baitulos*, was brought to Rome and arrived on April 12, 204.⁴⁸ Entering the city, “the matrons, each taking their turn in bearing the sacred image, carried the goddess into the temple of Victory on the Palatine. All the citizens flocked out to meet them, censurs in which incense were burning were placed before the doors in the streets through which she was borne, and from all lips arose the prayer that she would of her own free will and favor be pleased to enter Rome.”⁴⁹ Given fresh confidence by their fulfillment of divine pleasure, the Romans proceed with the invasion of Africa, leading to the victory of Scipio over Hannibal at Zama and the end of the war.

The importation of Magna Mater was one of many such cult importations during the Roman Republic. Cybele, Aesculapius, and Castor and Pollux were all introduced to Rome in similar circumstances after consultation of the Sibylline Books and religious oracles, “examples of a very common practice . . . to introduce a god from outside in times of national crisis. In most cases it may be viewed as a ‘crisis ritual,’ necessary for saving the city in the particular circumstances.” Aesculapius, for instance, a healing god, was imported during a plague in the early third century.⁵⁰ Turcan notes that, because of the common additions of new gods during times of crisis, Rome had a “pantheon that tended to diversify almost indefinitely.”⁵¹ As the most pious of all men and a people set aside by their close connection to the gods, it was

⁴⁷ Ibid., XXIX.10

⁴⁸ For an interesting discussion on the connection between Magna Mater and the *baitulos*, see chapter 2 of Ando, *Matter of the Gods*; he discusses the paradoxical extent to which the goddess was embodied in that specific black stone and to which the black stone was merely representative of her, and that there could be many such “black stones” that represented the goddess. She both was, and was not, in the black stone transported to Rome.

⁴⁹ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, XXIX.14. For the extent to which Magna Mater was recognized as saving Rome, see Lipka, *Roman Gods*, 120-123, for a discussion of Cybele’s iconography and religious worship at Rome after the war.

⁵⁰ Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum*, 39-40. See also Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 105.

⁵¹ Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 105.

centrally important for the Romans to recognize all the gods, as this was what defined them as a people. While Turcan presents it as an admission “that different gods enjoyed full powers in order to be sure of having all the luck on their side,”⁵² I find that statement falls a bit short; the Romans were concerned to recognize the power of *all* the gods, whether known or unknown, because that was *who they were*. It was the very core of their identity that they were the pious nation, and worship of all the gods was part of that.

4.3 Religion and Boundaries

A third subject by means of which Augustan writers drew attention to Roman religious identity was the discussion of religious boundaries. No matter what conception one uses to define a particular group’s identity, it is necessary for there to be boundaries that define what is in and what is out. When the group’s identity is sacral, these boundaries must define which religious practices are acceptable and which are unacceptable and prohibited. As Beard, North, and Price emphatically state, “Traditional Roman paganism was not . . . ‘completely tolerant, in heaven as on earth.’ The fact that there was a plurality of gods did not necessarily mean that religion had no limits, or that . . . ‘anything went.’”⁵³ The most notorious incident illustrating this point in Augustan literature is Livy’s narration of the Bacchanalian Affair of 186. Analysis of Livy’s description of these events in light of the boundaries of Roman religious practice in Livy’s own time reveals how the limits of Roman religion were conceived during this time period as well as it further illustrates the centrality of religion to the conception of Roman identity in the Augustan era.

⁵² Ibid., 116.

⁵³ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 212.

In 186, Livy tells us, the consuls were informed by P. Aebutius and his lover, Hispala Fecenia, of the unnatural horrors going on during Bacchic rites both in Rome and all over Italy. Hispala testified that at these rites, performed at night five times a month, “there was no crime, no shameful deed left out. More violations of men with each other than with women were committed. If any one was less enduring of the dishonorable deeds and was unwilling to commit any crime, they were sacrificed as victims. To consider nothing *nefas*, this was the height of religion among them.”⁵⁴ The group allegedly counted many noble Roman men and women among its ranks and “they were a vast multitude, already nearly equal to another people, as large as the Roman people.”⁵⁵

In addition to Hispala’s description of the Bacchic rites given to the consuls, Livy also recounts a speech given by the consuls to the people gathered in assembly.⁵⁶ Here the lurid description of the Bacchic rites is repeated, but is supplemented by the consuls’ insistence to the people of the danger these rites pose to the city. At the climax of the speech, the consul stated, “Unless you take precautions, Quirites, now this public assembly, belonging to the day and called lawfully by the consul, will be equaled by another assembly belonging to the night. Right now, they fear you – a single, united whole gathered in assembly: but when you will have broken up and returned to your homes and to your country estates, they will come together, and they will plan their own safety together and your destruction.”⁵⁷ As Livy narrates it, the rites were brutally suppressed all over Italy; any who had just been verbally initiated were imprisoned, while any who actively participated in the rites were sentenced to death, and “more men were put to death

⁵⁴ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, XXXIX.13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XXXIX.15-16.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XXXIX.16.

than were thrown together in prison shackles.”⁵⁸ Livy’s account is as vivid as it is sensational, describing a dangerous conspiracy as much as a minority religious ritual practice.

Interestingly, we are able to compare Livy’s account of the affair against the text of the actual decree issued by the Senate in 186 concerning the members of the Bacchic cult. The decree confirms Livy’s description of the actions taken by the Romans in response to the cult: participation in the rites was limited to groups of five or fewer, and only with Senatorial permission, while any unlawful participation in the rites, whether without permission or in large groups, would result in a death sentence.⁵⁹ The law, of course, does not include any comparable descriptions of the rites themselves that inspired this regulatory decree to those written by Livy, but the description of the results is consistent with Livy’s account. One cannot say for certain how accurate Livy’s description of the rites are, but the strong reaction as evidenced by the decree are certainly proof that, whatever was happening, Romans felt the need to react swiftly and powerfully.⁶⁰

Livy, of course, had to give a description of the Bacchanalian Affair, as it was certainly an important event in that year. Yet the attention Livy pays to the affair seems out of proportion even for a momentous religious dispute. He devotes a large part of Book XXXIX to the affair and its fallout,⁶¹ and goes into much more detail than he does in describing other religious issues in his history.⁶² What reason does Livy have for going into such detail, for placing such strong

⁵⁸ Ibid., XXXIX.18.

⁵⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 2: A Sourcebook* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12.1b.

⁶⁰ For an analysis of the law on Bacchic worship, see DiCazanove in Bispaham and Smith, *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, 2000. DiCazanove points out that the law has little to do with the rest of Italy, the Italian allies, rather only Rome and those parts of Italy that were directly controlled by Rome. The law, which it is possible Livy had access to, thus seems to be of greater importance for those more directly labeled as Romans than non-Romans, an interesting point when considering Livy’s use of the law to highlight Roman religious identity.

⁶¹ The description of the Bacchanalia Affair fills the entirety of XXXIX.8-19, more than one-fifth of the entire book.

⁶² See Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 104-5, where they discuss how Livy glosses over religious conflicts in the Republican period, usually only mentioning the opposing political views of religious disputants.

emphasis on this particular incident that it overshadows practically everything else in Livy's later extant books? This prominence makes the most sense when considering it in light of a religious conception of Roman identity in the Augustan era. As noted before, no matter what organizing principle is used for defining group identity, members must find ways to include and exclude people and practices as necessary. Livy uses the story of the Bacchanalian Affair to illustrate the boundaries of Roman religion - to define the limits of acceptable religious practice, so central to Roman identity.

The lines of the conflict are clearly drawn at the beginning of the consuls' speech. As Livy presents it, the consul says, "Never at any time before when we have gathered into assembly, Quirites, have these solemn supplications to the gods been not only so apt but also so necessary, for it reminds you that these are the gods, whom your ancestors established that we should worship, venerate, and pray to – not those others, who drive minds captured by perverse and foreign religious practices."⁶³ The consuls, and by extension Livy, present the conflict as a religious conflict that pits traditional, communal worship against the private, individual and associative Bacchic worship style. The affair is painted as a danger to the state, but it is a threat more specifically to the *pax deorum*, to the religious settlement of Rome which Livy once again here emphasizes as foundational and essential to Roman society and identity. In narrating this event that serves to highlight the meaning of Roman religious identity, Livy makes the case, particularly in the consuls' speech, that the specific boundaries of Roman religion are centered on the public-private divide. Public, communal worship that is either performed collectively or by some on behalf of the group as a whole is clearly Livy's meaning for appropriate religion. On the other hand, private worship that has little or no connection to the community as a whole is

This usual emphasis on political opposition fueling religious conflict makes the Bacchic rites, described in such vivid detail, stand out all the more as he actually gets into the religious issues in play in 186.

⁶³ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, XXXIX.15.

excluded, if not demonized. Bacchic worship in Livy's account was not only private, but individualistic, and thus serves as a perfect foil to Livy's ideal of Roman religion. The private, individual, or associative religion is dangerous, as it risks severing the critical bonds between the Roman community and the gods.⁶⁴ If Roman identity is religious to Augustans, it is also necessarily communal, proper religion.⁶⁵

This increasing concern with communal worship as opposed to individual, associative rites matches up well with another trend observed by Beard, North, and Price. These scholars note that in the Augustan period, there is a growing fear of magic, "the ultimate *superstitio*, a system whose principles were parodic of and in opposition to true *religio*."⁶⁶ They further define *superstitio* and magic as religious practices centered on the individual rather than the group; this distinction between *religio* and *superstitio* extends into understanding Roman religious identity. What they note as an intriguing contrast, demonstrating a shift in concern "from the purity of the capital alone to the maintenance of correct practices throughout the empire," I would argue is the distinction that Augustans used to define the boundaries of their sacral community.⁶⁷ The use of the category of magic served as a way to exclude undesirable religious practices without sacrificing the sacral identity of Rome for Augustans. In this way, Livy's narrative of the Bacchanalian Affair serves essentially as an origin myth for the expulsion of various religious practitioners from Rome in Livy's own age, a practice that had been ongoing for the past 150

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 86, in reference to Bacchic worship: "Such practices, with their appeal to the individual as a member of a group other than the civic community, were essentially un-Roman and, as such, inevitably aroused the suspicions of the state authorities."

⁶⁵ For a contrary position, see Ando, *The Matter of the Gods*, 106-7. He argues that "to label something private or foreign was not necessarily to stigmatize it." However, he does also go on to distinguish that the different categories of cults, whether domestic and public or private or foreign, did indicate different obligations to the gods "on the part of aliens, individual citizens, and the citizen body itself," so that it might perhaps still be proper to acknowledge that the foreign or private cults are not necessarily appropriate for Romans themselves even if they are acceptable for foreigners. Compare this to DiCazanove's interpretation of the Bacchanalian Affair above.

⁶⁶ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 218-219.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

years. Since Livy claimed Rome's sacral identity was ancient and traditional rather than new, the events of 186 provide an example from history that his contemporaries could look back to as proof that what they were doing as a sacral people was not new, but old and traditional, the Roman way for all time.⁶⁸

Perhaps most interestingly, Livy's narrative of the Bacchanalian Affair is very reminiscent of another major event in recent Roman history – the Catilinian Conspiracy of 63. More specifically, the way Livy tells the story of 186 parallels in many ways Cicero's attacks against Catiline and his conspiracy in his first oration *Against Catiline*. In the speech, Cicero demonizes Catiline as a man guilty of every kind of evil – “For some years now, no crime has occurred unless by you – no outrage has been committed without you; by you alone has been the murder of many citizens, by you alone the ill-treatment and plundering of your fellows – you, unpunished and free. You alone have been able to not only neglect the laws and investigations, but nevertheless also to overturn and shatter them.”⁶⁹ Catiline's evil drives Cicero to famously lament, “O the times! O the customs!”⁷⁰ The narrative of events is remarkably similar to Livy's tale of the Bacchae. Catiline and his conspirators threatened to destroy the Roman state, but Cicero, one of the year's consuls, found out about the conspiracy and denounced the plot and, especially, its leader in a series of speeches, first before the Senate and then before the assembled people, a sequence of events mirrored in Livy's history of 186. Finally, the conspiracy was brutally suppressed, including the executions of its leaders, much as how Livy mentions the great number of men put to death in 186.

It seems likely that Livy in many ways wrote his history of the Bacchanalian Affair in such a way as to intentionally recall the Catilinian Conspiracy. This callback to recent history

⁶⁸ For example, the expulsion of Egyptian cults in 28 and again in 21. See Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 121.

⁶⁹ Cicero, *In Catilinam*, I.18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, I.2.

adds weight to the idea that the narrative of 186 was intended to illustrate the sacral character of Roman identity. Catiline's conspiracy was directed against Roman political institutions; the threat to Rome Cicero described in his invectives was a threat to Rome's civic identity, as described in chapter 2. Similarly, the Bacchanalian Affair specifically threatened Roman religious rituals; the threat to Rome Livy describes is a threat to Rome's *religious* identity. The two narratives run parallel because they describe similar threats to Roman identity, only the two describe threats to different visions of Roman identity, dating from fundamentally different epochs in Roman history.

5 Explaining Recent History and Contemporary Society

The theme of Rome's religious identity extended beyond discussions of the past to also loom large in discussions of Augustan society and recent history. An important part of the paradigm of Augustan writers is that late Republican society broke down due to a lack of piety. They are also sure to emphasize the greatness of the Principate and Augustus by focusing on the restoration of Rome's religious greatness; it is by getting back to their religious roots that Romans will be great again, and Augustus will lead them that way. This section will focus especially on the writings of Horace, essentially Rome's poet laureate in the Augustan Age, the court poet for Augustus. There have been many studies asking how we should interpret Horace's writings, particularly because he himself often features as a character in many of his poems. There have been a variety of suggestions as to how to answer this question, ranging from the suggestion that Horace the character essentially is Horace the man, to the viewpoint that Horace's "art has shaped his life," to others suggesting that "Horace's self-image reflects the man, being neither a wholly artificial creation nor an entirely truthful revelation," one of multiple personae adopted by Horace to present to the world.¹ Here, we will follow Randall McNeill's suggestion "that we approach Horace's texts as tools of detection . . . as a basis for reconstructing the larger surrounding social, political, and 'professional' artistic situations in which these poems were written and first received."² We should read Horace for hints about Roman society at large and Roman identity in the Augustan Age, rather than getting bogged down in questions of "Who is the real Horace?" Horace's personae do change over the course of his work, and it seems reasonable that Horace's self-presentation reflects shifts in Rome generally. He presents himself

¹ Randall McNeill, *Horace: Image, Identity, and Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 4-7. See this section for a brief, but detailed discussion of the different interpretations of Horace, focusing especially on Ellen Oliensis and Gilbert Highet, who respectively submit the first and third possibilities mentioned above.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

as a representative of the populace, albeit one involved in the highest circles of power, which also helps to explain his popularity not only with the high society but with the people of Rome generally.

5.1 Republican Decline

Writing during the civil wars, Horace mourned that “already another generation is wearing itself down with civil wars, and Rome is ruined by its own strength. . . We, an impious generation of cursed blood, will destroy Rome.”³ Descriptions of late Republican Romans as impious are a common theme in Augustan literature. As Beard, North, and Price note, “The piety and scrupulousness of the ancestors was a vital ingredient of their success in peace and war. . . [There was] the assumption that the political failure of the late republicans was intimately connected with their failure (as it was perceived) to maintain their traditions of piety.”⁴ This is deeply associated with the sacral view of Roman identity – Romans were a people marked by their special connection with the gods. Throughout history, as seen in the previous chapter, Roman historians blamed failures of the Roman people on religious failings, on severed connections between the Romans and the gods. This was not only true in the distant past, but also, and especially, in contemporary events.

Augustan writers emphasize the dilapidation of temples and the lapsing of priesthoods in the late Republic as indicative of a decline in piety. This decline in piety explains the widespread chaos of the civil wars, as thousands of Romans fought and killed each other during the last century of the Republic. In the *Odes*, Horace writes, “You, while innocent, will atone for the sins of your fathers, Roman, until you restore the tottering shrines and temples of the gods

³ Horace, *Epodes*, XVI.1-10.

⁴ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 77.

and their images, defiled with black smoke.”⁵ The situation is even worse than the Gallic invasion or the Hannibalic war, when individual divine warnings were ignored and individuals ignored consular rites before going out to war. Horace and other Augustan writers lay the blame on entire generations of Romans for ignoring the gods – forgetting their identity, leading to their destruction. Livy frequently punctuates his listing of the various prodigies in the years of his history with complaints that Romans of his generation no longer regard the omens the way that former generations did, no longer faithfully recording and expiating them the way the great Romans of his narrative did. Ignoring this powerful source of Roman identity has led to years of “impious slaughter and civic madness,”⁶ unparalleled destruction in the Roman world as the state approaches collapse.

Interestingly, Horace compares the present age to one of the legendary ages discussed earlier, the flood of Deucalion and Pyrrha. He writes that Jupiter “has filled with fear the City and the people, lest there should come again the gruesome age of Pyrrha, who complained of strange marvels, when Proteus drove all his herd to visit the lofty mountains.”⁷ He fears that “the young men, lessened by the faults of their parents, will hear that citizen sharpened iron against citizen, whereby the unpleasant Persians had better been ruined, and they will hear of battles.”⁸ Pious Romans, the Romans Horace and his contemporaries looked back on as the creators of the empire, properly worshipped the gods and were rewarded with dramatic victories against their enemies. Contemporary Romans, however, ignored the gods and as a result only fought each other, destroying the legacy they had inherited from their own forefathers and

⁵ Horace, *Odes*, III.vi.1-4.

⁶ Ibid., III.xxiv.25-26.

⁷ Ibid., I.ii.2-8.

⁸ Ibid., I.ii.21-24.

threatening the loss of the empire. The only victories this generation of Romans will remember are no victories at all – only the killing of Romans by other Romans.

A large number of scholars, such as Turcan, fully buy into the historicity of the decline in Roman piety in the late Republic. He writes, “In the first century BC, the auspices were no longer used except in electoral manipulations, and signs from the gods were neither invoked nor rejected except for political ends. . . Prodigies were hardly recorded or interpreted any more; many rites fell into disuse and temples into ruin.”⁹ The concept of decline is frequently taken for granted in literature on Roman religion, based on the evidence from such Augustan writers as Horace and Livy. Beard, North, and Price, however, advocate a radically different viewpoint, for the first time showing “that the Augustan representation of late republican temple dilapidation – however crucial to Augustan *self*-representation – is, in late republican terms, a *mis*-representation.”¹⁰ The authors examine the records of temple building in the late Republic and argue that the rates of temple building and abandonment were no different than in any other era of Roman history. Even the famously vacant priesthood of the *flamen Dialis*, the sacred priesthood of Jupiter that went unclaimed from 87 to 11 until being at last filled by order of Augustus in his new role as Pontifex Maximus, is explained by emphasizing the way the rituals of the office were filled by other pontiffs. The rituals carried out by the *flamen Dialis* were never abandoned even when there was no one in the office; Beard, North, and Price come across as impressed by the dynamism and creative adaptations this implies rather than seeing decline.¹¹ Yet, as they note, “it may be that the nostalgia of the late Republic, the pervading sense (whatever the truth) that religion was somehow in better shape in the past, is one of the most

⁹ Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 103.

¹⁰ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 122.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130-132.

important characteristics that we should be investigating.”¹² While those writers were concerned on narrating the history and practices of Roman religion and hence could not spend too much time answering this question, I believe that this paper is answering that charge, looking at just why it was important to Romans to see decline in the late Republic, regardless of what was going on in “reality.” They are absolutely correct to see that visions of decline were important to Roman identity, specifically this Augustan sacral view of Roman identity that explained both successes and failures in terms of religious practice.

5.2 *Portraying Augustus and his Rivals*

An important way of presenting the sacral view of Rome was promoting Augustus as a sacred leader, connecting him to *pius* Aeneas by descent and by implicit comparisons between Augustus and the renowned, pious leaders of Rome in ages past.¹³ In addition to positive comparisons to great men, it was also important to make contrasts between Augustus and his rivals, to demonstrate that Rome was better with Augustus as leader than it would have been had he been defeated and any of his rivals acquired the place he currently occupied. This focus on rivals is quite important, because, as Powell notes, Romans at the time would have had no way of knowing that Augustus would have no further rivals after Actium, or that he would live until AD 14, establishing a precedent that led to almost 500 years of empire. We know that there was no rival after Actium because we have over 2,000 years of hindsight, and we know he survived because he *did*, but Augustus’ notoriously poor health would have made contemporaries nervous that he could die at any time and plunge Rome back into chaos.¹⁴ A powerful way to ensure that

¹² Ibid., 120.

¹³ For comparisons to Aeneas, see Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome*, 15-18. For comparisons to Camillus, see Miles, *Livy*, 122-125.

¹⁴ Powell, *Virgil the Partisan*, 21-23.

Augustus' settlement would last would be to connect it ideologically with a superior vision of *Romanitas* that surpassed that of Octavian's rivals during the period of the civil wars. His two main rivals, of course, were Sextus Pompeius, the son of Pompey the Great, and Mark Antony.

The Pirate. Most works on the civil wars and early Principate portray Mark Antony as Octavian's primary rival and Sextus Pompeius as little more than a pirate. For instance, John Julius Norwich completely omits Sextus in his discussion of the civil wars and focuses solely on Octavian and Antony; Sextus is apparently nothing more than a temporary annoyance not worth spending valuable pages on when writing a large-scale history.¹⁵ Tom Holland does narrate the career of Sextus, but sees it as relatively unimportant, a mere warm-up for Octavian's true test in the years to come against Antony. As he puts it, "Once again a Pompey fought a Caesar, but they both seemed, in comparison to their giant fathers, dwarfish thieves. A pirate and a gangster: fitting generals to scrap over a city no longer free."¹⁶ These visions of Sextus stem from Augustan literature, where Sextus is rarely mentioned; although Livy's work for the years of the civil wars are lost, he merits not a single mention in the *Aeneid* and is mentioned only once in Horace's *Odes* and *Epodes*, an indirect reference in *Epode IX*, where the poet writes, "Just as lately, when driven from the strait the Neptunian leader fled, with his ships burned, though he had threatened the city with chains, which he had drawn off from perfidious slaves, his friends."¹⁷ The only mention between these two great poets of the Augustan age presents Sextus as a defeated admiral leading a navy composed of runaway slaves. The description is as hostile as it is brief.

¹⁵ John Julius Norwich, *The Middle Sea*, 42-43.

¹⁶ Holland, *Rubicon*, 353. Holland goes on to describe Sextus as "never a fatal threat to the Caesarians" before moving on to the "real" struggle against Antony and Cleopatra.

¹⁷ Horace, *Epodes*, IX.7-10.

This work, however, follows Powell in seeing Sextus as much more of a threat to Octavian and an important source of Augustan ideology. As he notes, “For Augustus and Virgil the memory of Sextus was an intense embarrassment, best assailed implicitly and indirectly . . . Sextus had humiliated Octavian, lastingly. Augustan propaganda, as so often with political discourse, was shaped by the successes of the opponent while also being contrived to obscure those successes.”¹⁸ Powell insists that much of Augustan literature presents Augustus in such a way as to directly answer the accusations of Sextus against Octavian, without directly mentioning the source of those criticisms (and thus to actively give voice to the attacks).

Particularly important to the ideology of Sextus was the concept of *pietas*, Vergil’s greatest theme in the *Aeneid* and a virtue attributed to Aeneas, the ancestor and stand-in for Augustus in the poem. Powell successfully connects the development of the concept of *pietas* to the rivalry between Augustus and Sextus. The rivalry stemmed from the proscriptions after the murder of Julius Caesar, when the second triumvirate of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus ordered the deaths of potential threats, forcing people to either turn against their friends and relatives or equally face the wrath of the triumvirs. The triumvirs claimed *pietas* as justifying the death lists, as they were avenging the death of Julius, adopted father of Octavian and mentor to Antony. Yet “during the killings, the *pietas* displayed by relatives and others towards the condemned, and the contrasting mercilessness of the Triumvirs towards their own relatives and acquaintances, allowed opponents of the revolutionaries . . . to riposte with a far more convincing claim of their own – that *pietas* lay on the side of the victims, while the Triumvirs represented the opposite quality.”¹⁹ Sextus particularly benefited from this claim, as many of the proscribed men fled to join his cause in Sicily, and he himself claimed *pietas* in vengeance for the death of his own

¹⁸ Powell, *Virgil the Partisan*, 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

father. Indeed, the connection between Sextus and the proscribed men is evident from the fact that when Sextus signed a treaty with the Triumvirs in 39 to end his naval blockade of Rome, one of his conditions was that Octavian and Antony “accept back men whom they had publicly sought to kill, but they also promised to return to those men a fraction, one-quarter, of their confiscated property.”²⁰

Sextus was indeed a great rival to Octavian, particularly at an ideological level, as his claim of *pietas* was more strongly accepted at the time and gave him moral superiority. He was very careful to emphasize the importance of his piety; he did not call himself Sextus Pompeius, even, but rather called himself *Magnus Pius*. The name can be seen on his coinage, many examples of which still survive. From the very beginning, a denarius of Sextus from Spain dating to 45 or 44 shows the head of his older brother, Cnaeus, on the front (as he was the leader of the Pompeian cause until his death) and personified *Pietas* on the reverse, holding a scepter and a palm branch.²¹ Another coin, a silver denarius minted by Sextus in Sicily between 42 and 40, has Pompey’s head on the front with the text “Mag[nus] Pius Imp[erator],” or Magnus Pius the Commander. The reverse shows two brothers carrying their parents away to safety, with Neptune in the middle, symbolizing both Sextus’ naval power and his *pietas*.²²

This lasting claim to *pietas* by Sextus helps to explain the emphasis placed in Augustan literature on the piety of Augustus and his family; it was a powerful claim for Sextus and a way to attack Octavian, and Augustan writers found a way to answer the criticism and attribute the virtue to Augustus himself. As noted before, Augustan writers gave special claims to *pietas* to Augustus and the Julian family, due to their descent not only from Aeneas but specifically from

²⁰ Ibid., 71. The treaty is the Pact of Misenum.

²¹ CoinArchives LLC, “Coin Archives: Ancient Coins,” <http://www.coinarchives.com/a/>. The archive contains a large set of coins minted by Sextus Pompeius, including the specific ones discussed here. Almost every one of Sextus’ coins, however, features the same themes.

²² Ibid.

Iulus, the descendant of Aeneas with special claim to religious authority. In a piercing analysis of this aspect of the *Aeneid*, Powell writes of Vergil's obsession:

that *pietas* was the chief of virtues and that the Julian line was its chief possessor, implied the enduring supremacy of that family . . . The massacres [the proscriptions of the second triumvirate] had expressed in blood a belief, in their perpetrators, that the interests of others should be subordinated to those of the Julian clan. Vergil gently gives to murder its imaginative underpinning. The poet takes the very virtue that was held up popularly against Octavian, and seeks to make it his title to rule.²³

By asserting *pietas* as the special quality of the Julian family, Vergil asserts Octavian's *pietas* in avenging Julius is superior and morally prior to the *pietas* of those protecting victims of the proscriptions. Other claims to *pietas* must, of necessity, be secondary to his. In this way, Vergil answers Sextus' claim that *pietas* was on his side while Octavian was the *impius* one; he seizes the most powerful ideological argument of Augustus' rival and uses it against him. So long as *pietas* was associated with Sextus and not Octavian, then the ideology of Sextus could be used by opponents of Augustus to stir up rebellion and belittle or even subvert his rule. By appropriating the doctrine to Augustus' cause, Vergil allows Augustus to use the claim to his own advantage and ignore Sextus completely, silencing a powerful opposition viewpoint that, by its very *Romanitas* and claims to piety, would have presented a lasting challenge to the Augustan image of the world. Thus, it seems that at least in some ways the Augustan insistence on the sacral nature of Roman identity and specifically of Augustan leadership stems from efforts to answer the critiques of Sextus.

The Easterner. While it was a challenge for Augustans to draw favorable contrasts between Octavian and Sextus, a task that required Vergil to write an entire twelve book epic, for instance, it was quite simple for Augustan writers to fit Antony into their narrative of Augustus

²³ Powell, *Virgil the Partisan*, 77.

as the paragon of Roman piety leading a sacral nation. “With his foreign associations, Antony was a gift, and a relief, for Augustus.”²⁴ The victory at Actium provided a dramatic moment for writers to focus on, and the divide of east versus west allowed writers to contrast Octavian’s authentic Roman piety against Antony and Cleopatra’s eastern superstitions. Indeed, Antony’s abandonment of Rome to live in Egypt with Cleopatra allowed Augustan writers to at times elide the Roman Antony completely out of the picture and present the clash as between Octavian and Cleopatra alone. In a poem celebrating Octavian’s victory at Actium, Horace writes, “a mad queen was planning ruin to the Capitol and destruction for the empire - with her polluted band of men, foul with disease - who was pleased to hope for the impossible and drunk with the sweetness of Fortune. But the preservation of scarcely a single ship from the flames diminished her fury, and Caesar drove back her thoughts, mad with Mareotic wine, to true terrors.”²⁵ Antony makes not a single appearance in the poem, and Actium is imagined as a clash of cultures: Roman west under Octavian against Hellenized Egyptian east led by Cleopatra; that the east’s co-commander was also a Roman is easily ignored. As Habinek describes it, “Octavian [and writers in his party] employed the classic strategy of uniting the home front in opposition to a demonized external enemy. Part and parcel of this rejection of Egypt and the East was the development of Rome as *altera Alexandria*.”²⁶ Rome becomes even more important than ever before in Roman ideology, as Augustus assures his fellow Romans that there will be no power shift toward metropolitan Alexandria or other Eastern cities. Rome and its gods grow ever more important to Roman identity and ideology, as Octavian distances himself from Antony’s easternizing tendencies.

²⁴ Ibid., 141.

²⁵ Horace, *Odes*, I.xxxvii.6-16.

²⁶ Habinek, *Politics of Latin Literature*, 91.

Other writers were also quick to realize the rhetorical use of Antony's association with Cleopatra and the east, enabling them to further cement Augustus as the holy leader of sacral Rome, defending traditional religion and gods against eastern ones. In his famous description of Actium, Vergil thus describes Octavian: "Here is Caesar Augustus driving the Italians into battle with the Senate fathers and the Roman people, with the *penates* and the great gods."²⁷ Vergil explicitly draws attention to the religious nature of the conflict, as the Roman community fights side by side with the Roman gods to whom they are so closely connected. Likewise, he does the same thing when describing Antony's forces, again drawing attention to the conflict between the gods connected to the peoples in the battle. He writes, "Here is Antony with varied barbarian powers in arms, the victor with the peoples of the East and from the Red Sea, and he drives Egypt and the men of the East and, with himself, furthest Bactria; and his Egyptian wife (how monstrous!) accompanies. . . All kinds of monstrous gods, and Anubis the barker, against Neptune and Venus, and against Minerva, hold their spears."²⁸ Antony abandoned the Roman gods of the community and sided with their rivals from Egypt. As Ando notes, "The victory of Augustus and the West might therefore be understood as a victory of one set of gods – one set of anthropomorphic gods – over the bestial gods of their enemies."²⁹ That the Romans fight together with their gods demonstrates the close connection between the community and its gods – the community as the chosen people, the earthly representatives of those gods, fighting to defend the honor of the Roman pantheon and in turn receiving the blessings of those gods.

²⁷ Vergil, *Aeneid*, VIII.678-679.

²⁸ Ibid., VIII.685-700.

²⁹ Ando, *The Matter of the Gods*, 122.

5.3 Restoration

Parallel to claims of late Republican decline and contrasts with Augustus' rivals were claims of religious restoration and revival under Augustus. These claims are quite significant, indicating that Romans believed they had returned to the roots of their identity by restoring religious practices. Some sort of restoration was necessary, as Rome "had lost its soul. Or so the Romans feared. The challenge – and the great opportunity – for Augustus was to persuade them of the opposite."³⁰ The myth of the Augustan restoration provided a way for Augustans to blame the chaos of the late Republic on impiety while taking a positive view of the Augustan age by seeing it as a return to age-old principles of religious piety. Even as Augustus wrought huge changes to Roman society by effectively ending the Republic and initiating the Principate, "he was able to represent this discontinuity as continuity at a deeper level, a return to older and more authentic Roman traditions . . . [a] 'deeper' continuity."³¹ Beard, North, and Price note the importance in Augustan literature of using Camillus' reestablishment of ancestral rites to foreshadow the restoration of Augustus 350 years later.³² Horace gives his hearty endorsement to the idea of an Augustan restoration, writing that, "As long as the pontifex [Augustus, recently named Pontifex Maximus] with the silent virgin climbs the Capitol," the Roman state shall be secure.³³ Augustus has, by his remarkable piety, renewed the Roman relationship with the gods that was so vital in Republican successes. The combination of decline and revival literature in the Augustan Age served to strengthen Augustus' personal position as well, as Wallace-Hadrill has noted; for "if civil war and immorality are identified with each other, and neither can be

³⁰ Holland, *Rubicon*, 368.

³¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, 239.

³² Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Vol. 1*, 168. In a line that I think particularly fits with my own theme of looking at emphases in literature rather than searching for historicity, the authors here write, "This stress was not an innovation of the Augustan age, but it was particularly emphasized in the writing of the period."

³³ Horace, *Odes*, III.xxx.8-9. See Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 54, for analysis of the poem.

ended except through the mediation of the ruler, the consequence is to identify sin and rejection of the ruler.”³⁴

An important part of the concept of restoration was Augustus’ building and repairing of temples. In his *Res Gestae*, he writes, “Two and eighty temples of the gods I rebuilt in the city during my sixth consulship by the authority of the Senate, with none having been omitted which at that time were in need of rebuilding.”³⁵ He mentions by name many of the temples he repaired, including some of the oldest and most important temples of the city, such as those to Juno Regina, Jupiter Libertas, Mars Ultor, and Magna Mater. The restoration of temples was not limited to Rome, however – Augustus also celebrated his restoration of temples around the empire: “In the temples of all the cities of the province of Asia, I, the victor [at Actium], restored the ornaments which from the spoiled temples he [Antony] had possessed as a private person when the war had been going on.”³⁶ This restoration of imperial temples comes before his discussion of his political actions in the provinces, indicating the priority given to religious actions in Augustan ideology.³⁷ Paul Rehak has noted that the construction of such monuments as the *Ara Pacis*, the Altar of Peace, were particularly important to Augustus in his campaign to advertise his own power; Augustus architecturally justifies his almost-monarchical power by emphasizing his religious piety and the peace it has brought.³⁸ It is also significant that these actions of Augustus are detailed in his *Res Gestae*. These inscriptions are not just narrations of the deeds of Augustus’ life and reign; “it presented the life of Augustus the way he wished to be

³⁴ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology,” *Past & Present* no. 95 (May 1982): 29.

³⁵ Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24. Augustus never mentions Antony by name.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of the ideology of public building in Italy during the reign of Augustus, see Mario Torrelli, *Studies in the Romanization of Italy*, trans. by Helena Fracchia and Maurizio Gualtieri (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995), 191-205.

³⁸ Paul Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), xiii, 96-138.

remembered.”³⁹ The *Res Gestae* is in no way comprehensive of everything Augustus did; it is selective and focuses exclusively on those things Augustus himself viewed as most important. That he devotes such attention to describing his religious construction projects is worthy of note.

Augustus not only restored the temples but also gave the orders for different statues to be placed in the temples as well as in the *fora*. These statues of famous Romans, whether his own ancestors or other famous Romans who embodied specific Roman virtues, were clearly intended “to provide models of good leadership. According to Suetonius, Augustus announced publicly that he had designed the forum so that the Romans might judge Augustus himself and future leaders according to the standard set by these men.”⁴⁰ Augustus is very concerned about the organization of space, using it to draw attention to models of greatness – specifically models of piety. Statues of *pious* Aeneas and Iulus, the holder of sacral power, flanked Camillus, the pious restorer of Rome after the Gallic invasion.⁴¹ Augustus organizes space so as to emphasize those virtues that are most central to Roman identity, and he gives especial importance to religious piety, indicating its importance to Augustan ideology.⁴² The greatest Romans, Augustus is clearly saying, are those who are closest to the gods.

Another important aspect of Augustus’ restoration is his realignment of the calendar. Julius Caesar as dictator had restructured the Roman calendar so as to get the various feast days and celebrations to properly align with the events they celebrated (such as to locate harvest rituals properly during harvest season). The calendar had included a leap day every four years,

³⁹ Suna Guven, “Displaying the *Res Gestae* of Augustus,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 57, no. 1 (1998): 30.

⁴⁰ Chaplin, *Livy’s Exemplary History*, 176.

⁴¹ For another example of organized space in the Augustan Age, see Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, “The Iconography of Sacred Space,” *Artibus et Historiae* 19, no. 38 (1998): 22-25. Joost-Gaugier focuses mainly on Hadrian’s Pantheon, but opens with a discussion of Agrippa’s temple, a forerunner of Hadrian’s later Pantheon, that was completed in 25 BC, discussing the various statues selected for the older temple, many of which were apparently already lost when Hadrian built his Pantheon.

⁴² For an especially detailed discussion of these issues of representation through physical imagery, see Holliday, “Time, History, and Ritual on the Ara Pacis Augustae,” 543ff.

but Romans after Julius mistakenly applied the leap day every four years inclusively, so that there had been a leap day every three years rather than every four. As a result, by Augustus' rule the calendar was already off by several days again, as there had been too many leap years. More than thirty years after the initial reform, Augustus set out to correct the mistake by skipping all leap days until the Roman calendar was realigned with the calendar as established by Julius. As Wallace-Hadrill notes, "This minor correction is greeted with a major fanfare. The month Sextilis is renamed Augustus, just as Quintilis had been renamed for the calendar-reforming Julius." There were widespread celebrations throughout the empire that year, including the dedication of the *Ara Pacis* and the *Horologium Augusti* in Rome.⁴³

Why was so much attention lavished on a correction to the application of leap days to the calendar, particularly when the calendar was only a few days out of balance? I propose that the reason was because Augustans were particularly concerned to celebrate the *fasti*, the religious days dedicated to the gods, on the correct day. There was great concern that celebrating the *fasti* on the wrong day, even off by just a day or two, would upset the gods and cause damage to the relationship between the gods and the Romans, the relationship that defined the Roman people. Livy's history had provided numerous examples of the disastrous effect of skipping rites and ignoring the relationship with the gods; Romans of Augustus' day were convinced that their greatness as a nation depended on proper maintenance of that relationship and took great interest in every minor detail. Ovid's *Fasti* provides a particularly detailed look at the Roman ritual calendar, detailing every sacred day and its background myths and meanings in the first six months of the year (it is assumed that Ovid was working on the poem prior to his banishment by Augustus, and abandoned the poem still unfinished). For example, the Magna Mater was given special worship in April, coinciding with the month when her cult statue was transferred to Rome

⁴³ Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, 242-245.

in 204.⁴⁴ As her arrival “in the *Urbs* in 204 BC was said to have brought immediate benefits to the harvests,” it was important to correctly align the celebration of her arrival with the time of her actual arrival, lest her blessings not come.⁴⁵ Ovid particularly gives attention to several rituals connected to temples that Augustus had specifically restored, thus drawing extra attention to the role of Augustus in restoring the Roman people, by both restoring the temple and properly locating the rites on the ritual calendar.⁴⁶ Augustus is the restorer both of ritual space and time, rebuilding temples and correcting ritual calendar imperfections. For example, Ovid mentions the ceremonies in honor of Quirinus on the next-to-last day of June in the temple to Quirinus on the Quirinal Hill, “which was among the most ancient in Rome and was restored by Augustus in 16 BC.”⁴⁷ By correcting the calendar, Augustus gave the Roman people confidence that their rituals would be carried out properly and fully accepted by the gods, ensuring the continuance of the sacral relationship between the gods and the Romans.

This restoration of and alterations to the calendar under Augustus served two additional purposes. First, Augustus makes the calendar more narrative. As Barchiesi notes, the traditional Roman calendar pointed many different directions as it was filled with many rituals and *fasti*, with no organizing focus. “But between the opening years of Octavian’s rule and 14 C.E., no fewer than thirty new additions were made, and they all refer explicitly to a single person, always the same one [Augustus].”⁴⁸ Each year, Augustus’ birth is celebrated, along with celebrations of his father, the day he assumed the consulship, the dates of his victories and triumphs, his assumption of priestly authority, his investment of new titles and powers – the calendar becomes more and more centered on Augustus himself, “and the old associative options – the *Parilia* and

⁴⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.4.

⁴⁵ Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 68.

⁴⁶ Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.29.

⁴⁷ Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 73.

⁴⁸ Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince*, 142-143.

the *Lupercalia* that ‘bring to mind’ Romulus – are now interspersed with truly prescriptive elements: on this date the prince was entitled ‘father of the nation.’⁴⁹ More specifically, the calendar is centering on a figure who has explicitly been associated with religious authority and piety, as discussed earlier. It is a religious figure who has become the focus of the calendar, so that time itself is becoming organized around a man who calls for Romans to adopt a sacral identity.

Secondly, Augustus’ calendar reforms more closely align him with Numa, Rome’s second king and religious founder. It has already been discussed in the third chapter how Augustan writers sought to compare the reigns of Numa and Augustus, but the calendar reforms bring yet another point of comparison as Augustus presented a revival of Roman religion. In addition to being the religious founder of Rome, Numa is also recorded as the founder of the Roman calendar: Livy notes that Numa divided the year into 12 months, with extra months every 20 years to account for the difference between the 12 month lunar calendar and the solar year, an attempt to automatically correct the calendar periodically.⁵⁰ Augustus’ reform of the calendar is a perfect parallel to Numa’s own calendar reform – Augustus likewise corrects the calendar to correct for differences between the calendar and the solar year. Augustus and his revival thus are intended to bring to mind the peaceful reign of Numa Pompilius, a comparison explicitly made by Livy, who describes Numa’s construction of the Temple of Janus at the foot of the Aventine Hill. The doors of this temple are opened in times of war and shut in times of peace; Numa was able to shut the doors after concluding treaties with all of Rome’s neighbors. But after Numa, the temple doors were only shut twice: once after the First Punic War, and again in the reign of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.19.

Augustus after Actium.⁵¹ Augustus, like Numa, is not only the restorer of Roman religion but the restorer of peace. As Livy has made Numa into the great model for Roman leadership (see the discussion in chapter 3), Augustus' revival further equates the two figures.⁵²

As this chapter opened with Horace's laments over religious decline in the late Republic, it is fitting to end with Horace's reflections on the religious revival of the Augustan Age. We discussed earlier how we follow McNeill in interpreting Horace's self-presentations as reflective of Roman society at large. Writing in the heart of the Augustan revival, Horace writes of his own religious conversion: "A meager and infrequent worshipper of the gods while a wanderer consulting foolish wisdom, now I sail backwards and retrace the path I had abandoned."⁵³ Horace and the Roman people had abandoned their religious identity in the late Republic, leading to the brink of annihilation; now he and the rest of his people are returning to the old ways of piety and communal religion. This is the heart of Roman identity in the Augustan Age – not only a sacral people, defined by their relationship with the gods, but a people who see themselves as having been such from time immemorial, returning to their roots and rediscovering

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² For a fascinating discussion about the connection between Numa and Augustus, see Paul Rehak, "Aeneas or Numa? Rethinking the Meaning of the Ara Pacis Augustae," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (2001): 190ff. Rehak takes on the dominant paradigm that the images on the Ara Pacis depict Aeneas in scenes from the *Aeneid*. He argues that the iconography is completely inconsistent with the Augustan picture of Aeneas; the figure usually interpreted as Aeneas is the wrong age, and is depicted with a beard whereas Aeneas is never pictured with a beard. The figure usually interpreted as Iulus should not be present in the image because he is filling the role of *camillus* in the sacrificial rite; however, this role required a person who had both parents alive, while Iulus' mother famously was lost and killed at Troy. Furthermore, the picture of the sacrifice is inconsistent with details of the supposedly same scene from the *Aeneid*. These are just a few of the many, many questions Rehak raises about the proper identification of the figure from the Ara Pacis. Rather than Aeneas, Rehak proposes that the Ara Pacis depicts Numa Pompilius – whose traditional iconography matches the figure in the image – and a foreign king sealing a peace treaty, a particularly apt image for the "Altar of Peace," particularly since, as noted above, Numa closed the doors to the Temple of Janus after establishing peace with Rome's neighbors. This is a particularly intriguing line of inquiry, as the Ara Pacis is one of the most important pieces of Augustan iconography, even in its own day. If Augustus chose to depict Numa, this would lend further credence to the increased role played by Rome's religious founder and the conscious parallels between the second king and Augustus.

⁵³ Horace, *Odes* I.xxxiv.1-5.

what made Rome great in centuries past. In so doing, they will make Rome great once more, and Augustus will lead them in this revival.

6 Conclusion

Augustans imagined themselves as members of a sacral people, defined by their relationship with the gods. They did so in contrast to Romans during the Republic, who defined themselves in a civic fashion by focusing on the socially unifying role of Rome's political institutions and the traditional *mos maiores*. Augustans, on the other hand, had far less interest in the *mos maiores* generally and focused more on the origins and historical development of their religious institutions. To do so, they elevated mythical and historical figures connected to religious practice while putting relatively less emphasis on those figures who originated Rome's political institutions. So, for example, Aeneas, Iulus, and Numa were emphasized at the expense of Romulus, and the religious aspects of leaders like Camillus and Fabius were given greater emphasis than in Republican accounts that focused more on their political and military skill. The relationship between Romans and the gods grew in importance compared to Republican emphases on Tyche, or Fortune. These are significant, since, as Polybius himself notes, "poets and authors reveal their real natures in their works by dwelling excessively on certain matters."¹ That Augustan writers almost universally focus on religion to a far greater extent than their predecessors indicates that they had a vested interest in emphasizing this element. The reason, as has been demonstrated, is that religion during this period became integral to Roman identity.

Roman writers demonstrated the centrality of religion to identity by focusing on three major themes. First, they emphasized a moment of ethnogenesis leading to common descent: this is found in Book XII of the *Aeneid*, when Jupiter declares that the Trojans and Latins will mix and be the most pious people in heaven or on earth. The Romans come from those included in that specific moment, which includes all the major families of Rome due to the historical genealogies whereby Roman families traced their lineages back to either Trojan or Italian

¹ Polybius, *Histories*, XII.24.1.

ancestry in this mythical age. Vergil himself is careful to include mention of ancestors of important families such as the Claudians during the muster of the Italians. This ethnogenetic moment is specifically sacral in nature, based on the decision of the gods to create this people, who are in turn to be defined by piety above all else.

Roman sacral identity was also defined by sense of place. This is illustrated by the stories illustrating the importance of the site of Rome, from the rescue of Romulus and Remus on the spot to their famous augury. The decision of foreign gods to come to Rome specifically and transfer their cult of their own volition demonstrates the special nature of the site of the city, and the deep connection between the location and the people are strongly emphasized by Camillus in his speech begging the Romans not to abandon their city and move to Veii. Augustus himself emphasizes the importance of place by establishing laws limiting religious practice within the *pomerium*, the sacred boundary of Rome. This is a special place, and religious practice therein must be conducted according to precise rules to maintain the special connection between the Roman people and the gods.

Lastly, Roman writers demonstrate Roman sacral identity through a sense of shared history. Livy's narrative in particular narrates the ups and downs of Roman history, defining Roman failures by moments of impiety and successes by restoration of a right relationship with the gods. The stories of the uprising of Appius Herdonius, the siege of Veii, the capture of the city by Gauls, the *devotiones* of the Decii, and the narrative of the Hannibalic invasion all present this same message. Gustafsson identifies it as "an ethical and soteriological thesis that may, at the most basic level, be formulated as follows: 'Rome will be successful and favored by the gods,

if the Roman state and people perform their religious and secular, national duties and, in short, in all matters act piously and virtuously.”²

These three themes, as it happens, line up precisely with those identified by Hall in the Introduction as together comprising the nature of an ethnic identity. These themes are recurring and powerful in Augustan literature, leaving little doubt as to the priorities of Romans of this age. They time and again draw attention to religious themes specifically, and when they discuss religious themes alongside other themes such as political, they give priority to the religious. A focus on religious precision reached almost a mania during the Augustan age, to the point where even minor calendar corrections to realign the *fasti* were heralded by massive celebrations and civic rejoicing.³

As mentioned in the Introduction, Augustans did not invent the concept of a sacral identity for Romans, but they gave it newfound meaning and importance. Republicans such as Cicero sometimes expressed similar ideas, but it was always only as one among many possibilities that might be used depending on the situation. Identity was more commonly connected to civic institutions. Augustus’ political aspirations might help to explain why Roman identity was reformulated so during this time period. If Roman identity was centered on Roman political institutions, then it stands to reason that those institutions would be seen as immutable, unchangeable. Augustus, though, set out to alter Rome’s political institutions – radically so. The transition from Republic to Principate would be incredibly difficult – if not impossible – in a Rome where the people saw the Republic as central to their identity. A shift from civic identity to a sacral identity, so that Roman identity was no longer so closely tied to specific political

² Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum*, 118-119.

³ See Rupke, *Religion of the Romans*, 80, for a discussion of the importance of precision in Roman worship, including the importance of addressing gods and goddesses by the proper gender, thus leading to the formula *sive deus sive dea* (“whether god or goddess”) so as not to accidentally insult a deity by using an improperly-gendered form of address.

institutions, made it possible for Augustus to change political forms and revolutionize Roman politics without encountering massive resistance.

During the Augustan age, this formulation of Roman identity moved from background to foreground and clears alternative conceptions to the side. This is critical, since as was discussed, Sewell focuses on the importance of shifting structures rather than radically changing things: change tends to be gradual and to utilize changes in pre-existing resources, such as the Republican concept of religious identity morphing to become the primary mode of identification for Romans in the Augustan Age. This kind of slow change is similar to the way Roy Rappaport describes changes in ritual. He notes:

Conscious attempts are sometimes made to cut new rituals from whole cloth, but they are likely to strike those witnessing them to be forced or even false. Those present may fail to become performers or participants because they may not know what is expected of them, because the expectations of the inventors may not be in accord with the impulses of the potential performers or because they may be reluctant to undertake formal, stereotyped, solemn or, possibly, grotesque public behavior unless it is sanctioned by time and custom, that is to say, by previous performances. A ritual which has never been performed before may seem to those present not so much a ritual as a charade. . . There is still room for the rearrangement of elements, and even for discarding some elements and introducing others, but invention is limited and the sanction of previous performance is maintained.⁴

Similarly, those who seek to redefine ethnic identity must do so using pre-existing materials; to suddenly argue that Romans have a sacral identity that they had never had before would have been rejected by the Roman people as inauthentic, unsanctioned by “previous performance,” so to speak. But by giving new emphasis to an already-existing mode of thought, Augustan writers were able to present old ideas in a new way, creating a whole new way of identifying Romans

⁴ Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 32.

that would be recognized as authentic by audiences due to its connections with an ideological strand that existed in earlier eras.

Better understanding of the nature of Roman identity in the Augustan Age should benefit future scholarship on this time period as well as those following it. This sacral vision of Roman identity is a critical lens for understanding how Romans saw themselves and the world during the early Principate, and remains at least one of many threads in the imperial period that follows. Recognizing this centrality of religion to Roman life ought to especially help scholars seeking to understand the religious environment of the Roman world, a common realm of study due to the historic rise of Christianity in the first century AD. When we realize the importance of religion to Roman identity, it becomes easier to comprehend the intensely strong reaction Romans had to (and against) Christianity. Like Bacchic worship in 186, Christianity threatened the sacral order by taking away all worship from the Roman gods and giving homage exclusively to the Christian God. While Judaism was also exclusive, it was generally limited to ethnic Jews and proselytism was not a major feature of the religion. Christianity, on the other hand, openly competed with any and all traditional religions for worshippers. While scholars have long recognized that it is this feature of Christianity – its relative atheism in denying any worship or even recognition to any gods but God – that was central to Roman reactions against Christianity, this insight has frequently been complicated by a view of Romans as less serious about religion – the stereotype of Romans as Enlightenment-style rationalists who perhaps kept up appearances with regards to religion, but really knew better and were relatively disinterested in religion. I hope that this study has contributed to better understanding of the foundational relationship between religion and Roman identity in the early Principate.

Yet I would also argue that this sacral conception of dominant source of Roman identity did not last, explaining why it has been underplayed in prior historical works on Roman identity. Most likely, it died with Augustus himself, who was such a central figure in the ideology and so strongly promoted it by his own self-description and actions. An important part of the sacral identity for Romans was the idea that by maintaining a proper relationship with the gods, they would be successful in all their ventures. In the early years of Augustus' reign, when he defeated his "impious" rivals and engaged in many successful military ventures,⁵ this ideology fit snugly with the historical playing-out of his Principate. The defeat at the Teutoburg Forest in AD 9 put an end to Roman expansion into Germany, a major goal of Augustus', and established the Rhine as the permanent border between *Romania* and *Germania*. Indeed, no major expansion anywhere in the empire occurred thereafter until Claudius' invasion of Britain in AD 43. This sudden shift away from ambitions of conquest caused a great change in ideology. As Derek Williams writes, "It is not feasible that Rome could switch from expansionism to the custodial role" without major changes in many features of life, including diplomacy, but also self-perception.⁶ No longer were the Romans invincible conquerors with the gods on their side; now they had lost their supreme confidence and were left struggling to just maintain what they already had, without hope of more conquest. The sacral conception of Roman identity required constant conquest, symbolizing the support of the gods for Roman rule over all other peoples less pious than themselves. With this dramatic change in Roman policy, the sacral view of Roman identity waned and went back into the background, no longer the dominant, primary vision of Roman identity. It certainly did not disappear – the situation merely returned to the status quo from the late Republican period, where the sacral conception was only one of several

⁵ Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 25-31.

⁶ Williams, *Romans and Barbarians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 24.

visions of *Romanitas* competing with civic and descent-based visions. In later periods, we do not find the same consistency between all the major writers of an era in their presentation of the vision of the world and Roman identity. The vision becomes fractured and multiple, drawing from many sources and pointing different ways rather than intensely focused in one direction as it had been under Augustus. With his disastrous defeat in the Germany, Quinctilius Varus did more than rob Augustus of a victory and three legions which were never officially replaced; he robbed Augustus of his own understanding of what it meant to be Roman.

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